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AN

ECCLIESIASTICAL HISTORY, K.

FROM THE BIRTH OF

JOHN the BAPTIST

TO THE

PRESENT TIMES.

"There cannot a more august idea enter the human mind, than a contemplation of the divine wisdom and power, as displayed in the method of diffusing the light of the Gospel throughout the nations of the world."

Principal Robertson's Sermon for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Thus to give our readers a full more excited idea of the importance of this grand division of our intended work, let us be furnished with the most respectful attention, that the Holy Spirit has thought it a proper conveyance of his regard, and by a variety of inspired writers, has traced the history of the church from the earliest period down to the second millennium of the

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY.

INTRODUCTION.

TO record events and their influence upon the actions of men, to trace their remote sources, and elucidate the characters of the principal agents, unbiassed by prejudice, and unwarped by opinion, is the province of history. And, indeed this of all other studies has ever been accounted one of the most pleasing and most interesting, as it presents to the mind a picture of transactions for thousands of years past. And certainly, if the civil history of mankind, every page of which is for the most part red with blood or black with guilt, excites our attention, the history of the church of God, which opens such wonderful scenes of wisdom, power, and goodness, claims our most profound regard.

But to give our readers a still more exalted idea of the importance of this grand division of our intended work, let it be remarked with the most respectful attention, that the Holy Spirit has thought it a subject worthy of his regard; and by a variety of inspired men, has traced the history of the church from the earliest period of time, to the accomplishment of the
grand

grand promise, the coming of the Messiah; and by Him and his Apostles, the diffusing of the gospel throughout the various nations of the earth.

View the sacred records, the most antient, and infinitely the most faithful history in the world, and you will there see, that no power was ever so signally employed in founding or overturning of states and empires as God has displayed in defence of his church. The devouring waves of the Red Sea were made her bulwarks, and the sand, the grave of her enemies, hath been a path for her passage *. The sun was arrested in his course to compleat her victories †; Angels have been commissioned to be her champions and fight her battles ‡. The merciless nature of the fire hath been curbed to preserve her children, and the mouths of hungry lions have been bridled for the same purpose §. Bloody tyrants, though invested with imperial power, have for their violence done her, been obliged to confess in inexpressible torments, their daring impiety and injustice, while consuming of the most loathsome of vermin.

Consider her stability, founded upon the rock of ages she has stood the shock of persecution when the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman monarchies have fallen in pieces and left no traces of their grandeur. Not one state, however renowned in the records of history, that hath maintained its standing, triumphed over its enemies, and subsisted by such unheard of methods as the church has done. And
although

* Charnock. † Exod. xiv. ‡ Josh. x. 13. § Dan. vi. 22.

although they may have been guarded by laws, hedged in with the best methods of government, and armed with a strong power to protect them, still some latent sparks of dissolution gradually gained force, till at last they blazed out in their final subversion. But amidst all these mighty convulsions by which thrones have been overturned, and seas of blood have been shed, she hath a charter of security, 'though I make a fall end of all nations, yet will I not make an end of thee *.' Politicians directed only by human foresight and conjecture, may pretend to assign the causes of the rise and fall of states and nations, but the Sovereign of the Universe gives the supreme cause why nations and kingdoms have been utterly destroyed. It is not because they have verily laid their yoke upon his church, but also because when blessed with her light, and having an opportunity of enjoying her liberty, they refused her easy chains and declined her service. 'The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish, yea those nations shall be utterly wasted †.' Our wonder then ceases when we hear her cry out in triumph, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ‡.'

To which we may add this important consideration, the pains which God has employed about his church,

* Jer. xxx. 11.

† Isa. lx. 12.

‡ Psalm xlvj.

church. Her birth was a work of greater power than the fabrick of the world. Nature felt convulsive pangs at the formation of the Jewish church. Fire, blackness, darkness, and tempest, attended that awful dispensation upon Mount Sinia. And the last glorious scene of bringing forth the Gentile church, was preceded by the darkening of the sun, the trembling of the earth, the rending of the rocks, the opening of the silent mansions of the dead, and oh, amazing! the death of the Son of God!

We need not then wonder at the high titles and honours with which God crowns her, as the apple of his eye, his vineyard, his pleasant plants, his jewels and a glorious diadem in the hand of God. In consequence of which, the inviolable promises of God are made to her of support, that her manna shall not cease, nor her rock forget to follow her during her residence in the wilderness; that her existence shall be coeval with the sun and moon; and that the boundaries of the earth shall only limit her spiritual conquests; so that although the Euphrates and the Danube seemed to be the unpassable bounds of the Roman empire, aided by all the force of their numerous legions, yet the banner of the cross, unassisted by human power, and in direct opposition to human policy, shall be carried triumphantly over all the kingdoms of the world.

But as this is the doing of the Lord and ought to be wondrous in our eyes, there cannot, to use the words

words of a profound and elegant historian, * ' A more august idea enter the human mind, than a contemplation of the divine wisdom as displayed in diffusing the light of the gospel throughout the various nations of the world.'

To exhibit this in as clear a point of view as possible, it may be proper, to give a brief sketch of the state of the world, prior to the rising of the Son of Righteousness, at that time involved in darkness, and which made all considerate men anxiously wait for that auspicious day to be ushered in by the desire of all nations.

It is true the divine power and wisdom was conspicuously displayed in making the religion of Jesus to arise upon a benighted world, striking conviction into the hearts of mortals by the irresistible lustre of its divine truths, conquering the passions and prejudices of men, confounding the opposition of nations and empires, furnishing new supports to civil and social virtue, and unfolding those sublime doctrines and maxims that tend to the perfection of human nature, and the happiness of human society. Yet the providence of God had so situated the affairs of men, as wonderfully contributed to these salutary purposes.

When Jesus Christ made his appearance in the world, the Romans had extended their dominion over a great part of the earth. That people had, from the contemptible origin of an association of banditti, gradually

* Principal Robertson, in his excellent sermon before the society for propagating christian knowledge.

gradually enlarged their boundaries and multiplied their conquests, till at last they arrived at a higher pitch of grandeur and majesty than any empire had ever done before them. Yet this formidable people, which had, during their republican state, deprived every other people of their liberty, were now in their turn deprived of their own. For by vesting in the single person of Augustus, the office of emperor, sovereign pontiff, censor, tribune of the people, in a word all the great offices of the state, they left themselves only a shadow of power, and felt during the subsequent reigns of a number of merciless tyrants, the fatal effects of entrusting unlimited power to the will of any one man.

It must however be acknowledged that this supreme dominion of one people, or rather of one man over so many kingdoms, was attended with many considerable advantages to mankind in general, and to the propagation and advancement of Christianity in particular. For by means of this almost universal empire, many nations different in their languages and in their manners, were united more intimately together in social intercourse, and by this a communication was opened to the remotest countries, and barbarous and savage nations were by their intercourse and commerce with the Romans polished and civilized. By this the benign influence of letters and philosophy was spread abroad in countries, which had lain before under the darkest ignorance. All which no doubt contributed in a singular manner to facilitate

tate the progress of the gospel and to crown the labours of its first ministers and heralds with success. *

Augustus at the battle of Philippi, having entirely vanquished all his rivals, was now after numerous proscriptions, battles, and executions, solely vested with sovereign power. And by judiciously stationing his victorious legions among the conquered provinces, from the banks of the Euphrates to the shores of Britain, the world enjoyed a profound peace, which was no doubt of signal service to the ministers of the gospel, as men's attentions were turned from listening to the confused noise of the warriors, to the more heavenly sounds of grace and truth.

But notwithstanding of the many salutary laws enacted by that prince, and his attention to the characters of the governors whom he appointed over the provinces, yet the empire was too vast to be ruled with equity and moderation. Accordingly we find in the history of that people, almost continual murmurs and insurrections, particularly among the Jews, on account of the rapacity of the publicans, and the severity and injustice of their haughty and imperious governors. To alleviate these and innumerable other evils under which mankind groaned, the PRINCE of peace made his appearance in the world.

Religion and philosophy, have in all ages been accounted subjects which claim the attention of a contemplative mind in a supreme degree. But, as the former at the coming of Christ had been wonderfully debased.

* Mosheim Hist. Eccles.

debased, and the latter was no better than the dreams of visionary men. The Son of God came to enlighten men's minds in the most important branch of all knowledge, (*viz.*) that of the true God in his essential glory, and relative goodness; and also to instruct them in the wisdom that is from above, not founded in airy speculation, but reduced to the most sublime and amiable practice; and, indeed, of which Jesus himself was a pattern of the highest perfection.

At the first dawning of Christianity the world was sunk in the grossest superstition and idolatry, and it is no injurious representation to say of it, that it lay in wickedness, a few of the Jewish nation excepted. And indeed, as nations seemed to be more polished, they became more superstitious; for they proceeded from the more sublime species of superstition, the worshipping of the host of heaven, to the deifying of their legislators, and of their princes, who while alive had sometimes soaked the earth with blood. Nay, even mountains, trees, rivers, the earth, sea, and winds, and what is more surprising, even vices of the most enormous kind had their temples, priests, shrines, and altars. And so debasing were their notions of their divinities, that they scrupled not to ascribe to them the most infamous crimes, lust, revenge, jealousy, falsehood. Their services and devotions were suitable to such deities, so that prostitution of their chastity, and sacrificing of their offspring, were affirmed to be acceptable to these divinities.

We may easily figure to ourselves how pernicious
such

such a system of theology must have been to the morals of men. And, indeed we find their minds instead of being sublimed and raised to the pursuits of piety and virtue, they were drenched in all kinds of pollution and impurity, of which, the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans draws a melancholy, but too true a picture.

Thus the Pagan religion had not the least influence towards the exciting or nourishing of solid and true virtue in the minds of men. The Gods and Goddesses to whom public homage was paid, exhibited to their worshippers rather examples of egregious crimes than of useful and illustrious virtues. While their priests were little solicitous to direct men's attention to the true paths of goodness; but on the contrary, like a another species of religion, to which it had a great resemblance, they openly taught that religion consisted in nothing more than the external observation of their established ritual.

To all this may be added, that their notions of immortality and of a future state, were extremely confused and contradictory; and therefore the hopes and fears of rewards and punishments in an after life, that mighty restraint upon the impious, had upon them little or no force.

Universal depravity of manners was the certain consequence of such wretched theology, and every where discovered itself in the impunity of the most flagitious crimes. Their pretended love for their country they affirmed, intitled them to destroy or enslave
other

other nations. Their amusements were sanguinary to the last degree, exposing thousands of unhappy captives taken in war to the dismal alternative either to fight with wild beasts, or to butcher one another. They exposed their helpless offspring to certain death, and broke the marriage bonds with criminal wantonness. Nay, they went to the enormous lengths of consecrating public stews and brothels to the honour of certain divinities, and what was still more extraordinary, all these crimes were committed under the sanction of the law! It must however be confessed that some of the more enlightened among the Pagans, strove to give their countrymen more exalted notions respecting the unity of the Deity, and universality of providence. But as they always proposed their notions with caution and uncertainty, their endeavours were of consequence feeble and inefficacious.

On all those accounts it required a stronger hand to stem the torrent of universal depravity, and a more effectual cure to remedy the evil. In compassion to men, therefore, the divine mercy sent the son of God from heaven for both these salutary purposes, and to bring mankind out of darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to serve the living God. An office which reflects the highest lustre upon the author of our salvation.

The state of philosophy at the coming of our Lord, was in little or no better a condition than that of the theology of the heathen world. It was divided into several sects, each of which, according to the passions
of

of men, had their respective votaries; but the chief of these were the Epicureans and Stoics. The former represented the supreme being as wrapt up in infinite felicity, utterly regardless of the actions of men, and the more pleasure and serenity of body and mind we enjoy, we are liker the Gods. The followers of Epicurus by this doctrine easily laid aside the idea of a providence superintending the actions of men; and to give a full loose to the gratifications of their passions, they affirmed was to constitute all human felicity. This was the doctrine that found incomparably the greatest number of followers, in the luxurious times of the Roman state, about the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Stoics founded their tenets in the irreverfible decrees of fate. They likewise maintained that the existence of the soul was limited, while they ridiculed the doctrines of the resurrection, as we find by their writings, and their well known disputation with the apostle Paul, at Athens.

It is to be observed, that pride, sensuality, and the applause of men were the foundations of their respective, and contradictory SYSTEMS. So that their doctrines were so far from having a tendency to make men wiser and better, that they generally extinguished the feeble glimmerings of nature's light yet remaining in their consciences, and thus left them worse than they found them.

Thus the divine wisdom, gave mankind a clear stage for four thousand years to employ the full force of their reasoning powers to find out that *chief good* which

which the restless mind of man is ever in quest of, And yet we find by the sayings of these renowned sages of the Pagan world, that the things which belonged to their peace were hid from their eyes; so that Plato justly observed, that there must of necessity A DIVINE TEACHER come down from heaven to unfold to men those doctrines, in the knowledge of which their happiness so much depended. He was right, for when they had lost the knowledge of the unity of God, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future state, of the exact retribution of rewards and punishments in another world, where the triumphing of the wicked shall be unknown, and the tears of good men shall cease to flow; they, on all these accounts, were unacquainted with the strongest restraints to vice, and also of the most endearing incitements to piety and virtue.

There was one people, however, yet in the world, viz. the Jews to whom God had been pleased to communicate the knowledge of himself, and with whom, considering the lamentable state of the neighbouring nations, this sacred light, it might have been expected, would have been cherished with the most anxious regard. But at the coming of Christ it was quite otherwise, for ever since their captivity in Babylon, although they from that period entirely renounced idolatry, yet they run into an extreme equally pernicious. They forsook the meaning and spirit of the law, and taught men to conceive of the kingdom of the Messiah, as centering in itself all worldly splendor and magnificence, and his throne to be

be founded upon the ruins of all the kingdoms of the world.

We must not omit taking notice of the three principal sects that almost comprehended the religious notions of the whole Jewish people. These were the Pharisees, Sadduces, and Essenes.

The first of these sects was by far the most numerous and popular, as their doctors varnished over their tenets, with all the exteriors of the most sanctimonious zeal, with great art and address; yet these were highly pernicious to the practice of true piety, as our Lord has set in a striking light, denouncing heavy woes upon these perverters of the spotless law of God. The grand source of their dangerous errors was their double sense in which they affected to explain the law. The one of which was obvious, relating only to the words; the other hidden and mysterious, being oral or traditional, of which they only had the interpretation, and which was always to be observed and followed however opposite to the letter of the law, which as our Lord observed, rendered the law of none effect by their tradition.

The Sadduces on the other hand adopted a system which had a reference merely to a present state, affecting to laugh at God, angels, and an invisible world confining their felicity to this life. They were followed by the gay, the voluptuous, and atheistical among the Jews.

The Essenes, notwithstanding the pompous account of them by Josephus, seem at best to have been only a few melancholy enthusiasts. A leading doctrine with them

them was, the denial of the re-union of the soul and body in a future state ; accounting the body a prison, from which at death the immortal spirit is eternally set free.

All these peculiar tenets, so utterly subversive of the purity of revelation, had little or no good influence upon the lives and morals of men. And, indeed, from the accounts of the Jews at the birth of Christ, they seem to have been in the lowest stage of depravity.

Their political situation was no less wretched. When Shiloah was to come, Judah was no longer to enjoy royal power. And this antient prediction was now verified, as the sceptre of that people was swayed by Herod an Idumean, one of those merciless tyrants permitted by providence, as a scourge to mankind. His death occasioned the division of the Jewish state into four tetrarchies. Soon after it was reduced into a Roman province, in which situation it groaned under the most insupportable slavery, till their final destruction, of which particular notice will be taken in its proper place.

From this brief view of the moral and political state of mankind, at the birth of our Saviour, we have seen how deplorable their condition was ; being in the expressive language of scripture, ‘ without God, and having no hope in the world.’

The shadow of death had fit down upon men, but with hearts glowing with gratitude, may we not cry out, all thanks to the Sun of Righteousness who hath changed it into the eye-lids of the morning ! Let us then conclude this introductory discourse with the words of an elegant and pathetic writer :

“ Oh

“ Oh blessed religion that opens such wonders. Oh dreadful religion if it opens them in vain ! and are there those with whom they go for nothing ? strange men ! in possession of a blessing, the bare hope of which supported the spirits of the wise for four thousand years, under all the calamities of life, and terrors of death ! and know they not that this blessing is in their hands ? or knowing, do they cast it away as a thing of no value ? a blessing, the very shadow of which made the body of the Patriarchal and Jewish religion ! a blessing after which the whole world panted as the Hart for the water brooks ; and on which the heavenly host were sent to congratulate mankind ! A blessing more than equivalent for Paradise lost !—and shall this celestial blessing be declined, rejected exploded, despised, ridiculed !—unhappy men * !”

* Young's Centaur not fabulous:

C H A P T E R I.

Containing the account of the Birth of Jesus Christ, and of his forerunner John, with the death of that renowned Prophet.

THE sun of righteousness being now, after a long night, about to make his illustrious and benign appearance, many devout persons considering that the prophecies concerning this mighty event were now to be accomplished, waited its approach with the
C
most

most anxious expectation. Nor were their expectations disappointed: for near the conclusion of the long and bloody reign of Herod, king of the Jews, and about the beginning of the reign of Tiberius, emperor of Rome, the Son of God descended upon earth; and taking upon him the human nature, appeared to men under the sublime characters of an infallible Teacher, an all-sufficient Mediator, and a spiritual immortal King.

This event not answering the expectations of the Jewish nation, who always connected the ideas of temporal grandeur and universal dominion with the person and character of the Messiah, He was on that account treated with the most haughty and virulent contempt.

The birth of so glorious a Personage however, was not unattended with some very remarkable circumstances, and those both in the Jewish and Gentile nations.

There was a constant and settled persuasion at this time, says Suetonius * that from the East should arise a Sovereign, who should sway the sceptre of the universe. Both historians and apologists, of high fame and credit among the early Christians, seem strongly to assure us, that from the day of this auspicious birth, the oracles among the Gentile nations became at once dumb and silent, overawed by the true prophet sent from heaven. They likewise appeal to the votaries and patrons of Paganism, if at the time of the flight of Joseph and Mary, with the blessed babe

* Suetonius in Vita Tiberii.

babe into Egypt, the numerous idols of that nation were not in one night universally overthrown. Challenges so fairly put to Emperors, Pontiffs, and Philosophers by these renowned apologists; men every whit as good judges of evidence, as our modern infidels, and with such an air of triumphant confidence in the certainty of their assertions, ought to influence us with no mean degree of credit to these positions *. But whether this event was instantaneous, or whether this silence of the oracles kept pace only with the spreading of the gospel, certain it is that the credit of these fallacious oracles, and the mighty influence of the Pagan rites, declined apace, from this memorable æra. And as God had authorised no Prophet since the days of Noah with an universal commission, having winked at these times of ignorance, but had now commanded all men every where to repent †; it is exceeding probable that the divine agency was exerted in the invisible world, and shortened the chains of these deceivers of the nations, when the infallible Prophet made his appearance.

The sacred historians likewise take notice of the arrival of three Magi or wise men, eastern chiefs, probably from Arabia Felix, by the direction of a supernatural star or meteor; and having discovered the abode and person of the divine Babe. They presented the parents with costly offerings, and paying the Saviour

* Tertulliani Apolog. Gale's Court of the Gentiles. Cudworth's Intellectual System. Miller's Hist. of Christianity.

† Acts XVII. 30.

of the world divine honours, they returned to their own country.

But after all, neither the year nor month in which Christ was born, can with any chronological exactness be ascertained. † Providence thus wisely drawing a veil over that, which the superstitious minds of men would draw forth; and quitting the substance would adore the shadow.

From the twelfth year of our Lord's life, when we find him in the Temple disputing with the Jewish Doctors, and amazing them with the wisdom he displayed, we have no traces of his history till the commencement of his public ministry, about the thirtieth year of his age. That he followed the employment of Joseph, and thus tasted of the curse, in earning his bread with the sweat of his brow, may possibly have been the case; but Ecclesiastical historians of the first rank for erudition and penetration, discard it as a vague and uncertain conjecture. Indeed the inspired historians do not afford us the most distant hints, upon which, with precision, we can found any hypothesis.

It was however during this period of retirement that those seeds of divine knowledge, implanted in his mind, were gradually cherished by the Spirit from on high, till at last when he publicly assumed the prophetic chair, they burst forth in that plenitude of perfection, which might justly claim that enraptured confession, NEVER MAN SPAKE LIKE THIS MAN!

Previous

† Mr Doddridge with his usual precision seems to prove that our Lord was born in September.

Previous to the commencement of our Lord's mission, his renowned forerunner John, made his appearance. He was about the same age with himself, and descended in a direct line of the priesthood. Of this illustrious prophet there were several remarkable circumstances which attended his birth, life, and death. Ever since the destruction of Solomon's Temple the Jewish nation had been deprived of some of their most glorious privileges; the chief of which were the Urim and Thummim, the symbolical fire, and the golden table, the pot of manna, and above all the spirit of prophecy. The loss of these privileges which distinguished the Jews above all nations of the earth, was by no means compensated by the profusion of wealth and magnificence with which Herod adorned the second Temple. But the presence of Jesus in this last Temple, infinitely counterbalanced the typical apparatus of the first; and in John the spirit of prophecy, was, after many ages of silence, revived in all its lustre. Memorable was that last promise with which the spirit of prophecy closes the Old Testament, "Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*" This prophetical passage was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist; for like Elijah, that great reformer and celebrated prophet, he
now

* Mal. iv. 5. 6.

now publicly assumed the office for which he was highly qualified by the Holy Spirit; and with a truly divine fervor, he roused and awakened that insensible and vicious nation to fly from the wrath to come. Austere and rigid in his manner of life, of undaunted courage and fortitude; he tendered his reprehension without regarding the distinctions of rank or of birth. Greedy tax-gatherers, haughty Pharisees, rapacious Soldiers, and insidious Scribes, addressing themselves to him for instruction, he admonished and reproved with severity and zeal, exhorting them to renounce their sins, for a dispensation was at hand of the last concern to mankind. Nor were his friendly and faithful admonitions without effect; for awakened by his rousing reprehensions, multitudes of Gentiles, Publicans, Soldiers, Harlots, and others, the most unpromising of mankind, flocked to the ministry and baptism of John, believed in the approaching Messiah, and by their importunate zeal, like violent invaders, snatched the kingdom from the Scribes, Pharisees, and heads of the nation, to whom it was first offered. Thus it was from this remarkable period, that 'the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent took it by force.'

But the most effectual means whereby this Prophet of the Highest prepared the way of the Lord, was peculiar to himself, and consisted in setting the Messiah before the eyes of the people, and convincing them that the Son of God was now manifested in the flesh. The coming of Christ had always been understood

stood as such a great and general blessing to mankind; that he was stiled the 'Desire of all nations.' His presence had been longed for by many generations, even prophets and kings had desired to see him, tho' it were but for one day. And therefore his immediate forerunner who prophesied not of him at a distance, but brought him as it were by the hand, and introduced him to his office before all the people, must needs have been very acceptable to all those who had just and true notions of their Redeemer.

If to these qualifications and advantages which were peculiar to the ministry of the *Baptist*, we also add those of his person and deportment, we shall discover more of that mighty energy which recommends his office, and made it so prosperous and prevalent among the people. We shall not here repeat what is remarked of him by the Evangelist, but only instance his humility and freedom from arrogance in his commission; for when all men mused in their minds of him, whether he were the Christ, and a solemn deputation was sent him from the Sanhedrim to resolve them in this; he answered with firmness, "I indeed baptize with water, but one mightier than I cometh, the latchets of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

The remonstrances of this holy man extended their salutary influences to all ranks and conditions of men; for we are told that a large part of the Jewish nation, awakened by his heavenly admonitions, formed the resolution

solution of amending their lives, and thus be fitted for the approach of the Messiah; in testimony of which they were initiated into the kingdom of the Redeemer, by the ceremony of immersion or baptism. Among the subjects of this new institution was Jesus himself, being like his brethren of the Jewish nation baptized in the waters of Jordan. But what crowns the character of John with unfading honours, is the dignity and complacency with which he foretells the future extent and glory of the Redeemer's kingdom, the sudden eclipse of his own person, and the superior lustre of Jesus which should veil all his own ministrations. This is recorded to us by the Evangelist John, in terms expressive of the most magnificent and disinterested testimony ever given to the Son of God.*

Having finished his course, he at last fell a victim to the cruelty of Herod, and like the other prophets obtained the crown of martyrdom in the cause of truth. But the virtuous man, whose courage does not recoil at the frowns or smiles of impious men, will view without dismay, the instruments of death.†

* John III, 25, 26. &c.

† ————— Sure the last end
Of the good man is peace ——— How calm his exit!
Night-dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary worn out winds expire so soft.
Behold him in the evening tide of life,
A life well spent, whose early care it was
His riper years should not upbraid his green;
By unperceiv'd degrees he wears away;
Yet like the sun seems larger at his setting
————— Oh! how he longs
To have his passport signed, and be dismiss'd!
'Tis done! and now he's happy—the glad soul
Has not a wish uncrown'd.

The Grave.

CHAPTER II.

Including the Ministry, Miracles, Doctrines, and Death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE Evangelical state being thus proclaimed and ushered in, by the preaching and ministry of the Baptist, our Lord appeared next more fully to publish and confirm it. To narrate at large all the circumstances respecting the public life and transactions of Jesus, is more properly the province of biography. Indeed every human attempt of this kind is anticipated by the care which unerring wisdom has taken to deliver to mankind a particular history of what our Lord did and suffered, by four Inspired Evangelists. Sufficient therefore will it be for us to remark, that about the thirtieth year of his age, our Lord emerged out of his voluntary obscurity, and to render his ministry more solemn and affecting to the Jews, the fore-runner John, in the presence of the people, baptised him in the waters of Jordan. At that moment an unusual radiance in the Heavens made way for the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove, and rested upon Jesus, attended with an audible voice, from the excellent glory, "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased *." From this period for three years was our Lord's life spent in the most unremitting diligence in instructing mankind.

D

kind.

* Mark i. 10.

kind. It is remarkable that all his doctrines, sayings, and miracles, exhibit the most friendly and benign aspect. It is true men have a right to enquire after a proof of the divinity of any new religious institution from its founder, and Jesus amply confirmed the authenticity of his commission, by a train of miracles, exhibited daily in the presence of the Jewish nation. Nor were they without effect, for many whose minds were susceptible of conviction, observed with reverential awe, the suspension of the laws of nature by a word or touch. But as the Gospel was to be a dispensation, whose spirit breathes peace and goodwill to men, the miracles which Jesus wrought in confirmation of the truth of his mission and doctrines, exhibited the same salutary tendency and design. Here no burning rain descends upon devoted cities; nor overwhelming seas bury guilty nations in a watery grave; nor does sudden vengeance descend in fire upon the heads of impious men. No, but on the contrary, to demonstrate that the son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them, the very first of his miracles was to turn water into wine,* whereas the first performed by Moses was turning water into blood. Almost every page of the gospel history is enriched with accounts of restoring health to the languishing, tormented patient; of calling to the silent mansions of the dead, to render back their prisoners; of expelling from agonized and distracted bodies and souls of men foul and merciless Demons. In

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*The conscious water knew its God and blush'd.

DRYDEN.

a word, the works which Jesus did in point of mildness, and from their benign tendency, outshone all the miracles of the Old Testament dispensation.

But to instruct men in the knowledge of the nature and blessedness of the kingdom of heaven, was one grand end of the coming of Christ. And the pride, covetousness, and superstition of men afforded ample work for our Lord in his prophetic character.

The extent of Christ's personal ministrations was limited to the narrow confines of Judea. The general tenor therefore of his doctrines was to rectify the innumerable disorders by which the artful Pharisees, and sensual Sadduces, had deformed the beauty, and debased the dignity, of the divine law. This our Lord did in his sermon on the mount, where his infinite wisdom in explaining the vast extent, spirituality, and obligation of the law, is most signally displayed. Another important intention of the doctrines of Christ, was to teach the Jews, and indeed all nations, that however significant and full of hope the mosaic dispensation had been, yet that was to give place to another vastly superior in many respects,

Not to mention the infinite difference between the persons employed, wherein Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, but Jesus the eternal son of God and heir of all things, was ruler over his own house, and therefore worthy of more honour than Moses*; yet the dignity and importance of the subject require our attention to some of the
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* Heb. iii. 3.

most considerable instances, in which this pre-eminence of the gospel appears.

First, in perspicuity and perfection. The Mosai- cal dispensation was almost wholly made up of types and shadows; the Evangelical has brought in the truth and substance of them all. The law of the Jews was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Their ordinances were but shadows of good things to come, but the body is Christ, the perfection and accom- plishments of their whole ritual administration. Their ceremonies were figures of those things that are true †. The land of Canaan typified heaven; Moses and Joshua were types of the blessed Jesus; the Isra- elites after the flesh, were the image of the true Isra- el, which is after the spirit; and all their expiatory sacrifices did but represent that great sacri- fice whereby Christ expiated the sins of mankind. In a word, the most minute and inconsider- able circumstances of the legal œconomy, were intended as little lights that might gradually usher in the sunshine of the gospel state. As a master in painting gradually finishes a picture from laying on a dark ground, some rude lines, and rough draught, he heightens these with glowing co- lours; so Moses introduced the first draughts and ideas; to these the prophets added many clear and express characters; at last the substance or perfec- tion of the whole was brought in by Christ himself.

To this may be added, that the evangelical service

† Heb. ix. 24.

is easy, and rational; whereas the ceremonial was a very grievous and servile dispensation. The rite of circumcision was painful and bloody; their numerous washings, fastings, and purifications, were burthen-some and oppressive; and the smoke of their sacrifices might justly make all considerate men weep and sigh for a clearer dispensation. With the highest propriety, therefore, says the Saviour, "my yoke is easy, and my burthen is light.*"

Once more, the gospel dispensation is infinitely preferable to that of the law, on account of its being founded upon more noble and excellent promises. Those of the law were of plenty, prosperity, and security from hostile invasion; all of which Solomon enjoyed to their highest extent, and yet he groaned upon a throne at the discovery of their vanity. But the gospel promises are of a more sublime and spiritual nature, and such as immediately concern the happiness of mankind, grace, peace, pardon, and eternal life.

Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, during the space of three years, and amidst the deepest trials of affliction and distress, instructed the Jewish nation in the will and counsels of the most high, omitting nothing in the course of his ministry that could contribute either to gain the multitude, or to charm the wise. Every one knows that his life was a continued scene of the most perfect sanctity, and the purest and most active virtue, not only without spot, but also beyond the reach of suspicion.

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* Matt. xi. 29, 30.

As Jesus Christ came into the world with no intention of continuing in it, but that this divine religion after his death, might be propagated to the utmost ends of the earth, it was necessary that he should chuse a certain number of persons to accompany him constantly throughout the whole course of his ministry; that thus they might be faithful and respectable witnesses of the sanctity of his life and the grandeur of his miracles, to the remotest nations; and also to transmit to the latest posterity a genuine account of his sublime doctrines, and of the nature and end of the gospel dispensation.

Therefore, of all the multitude which attended his discourses, Jesus chose twelve persons whom he separated from the rest by the name of *Apostles*. The qualifications of these men were such as human wisdom would have accounted utterly unfit for this important business. Poor, unlettered, of obscure descent, and without ambition, they were to wield those weapons which should overturn the deep-laid structure of paganism, and alter the Jewish constitution founded by God himself. Without learning, they were to confound the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Without wealth, they were to enrich the world with the most valuable of all treasures. Such were the men whose ministry Christ employed, that the fruits of their embassy and the progress of the gospel should not be attributed to human or natural causes. The Apostle Paul has demonstrated this with irresistible force

force of evidence *. It is remarkable that our Lord sent the twelve but only once in his life time to preach to the Jews †. He chose to keep them about his own person, that they might be thoroughly instructed in the affairs of his kingdom. The Evangelist Luke ‡ however informs us, that Christ sent out into all the coasts of Palestine, seventy disciples to preach the glad tidings of eternal life.

As every part of the gospel history is highly significant, it is not to be doubted that the number XII. was fixed on by Jesus Christ, to represent the tribes of Israel, thus asserting his supremacy as Lord and High Priest of all the Israel of God.

The number LXX. of which his disciples were composed, answers evidently to that of the Senators of whom the Council of the people, or Sanhedrim, consisted, and it would seem that by this choice of seventy, our Lord designed to admonish the Jews, that the authority of their Sanhedrim was now at an end, and that he had assumed the reins of government into his own hands.

There is among other incidents in the life of the divine Saviour, a very ancient tradition, that the fame of the illustrious acts of mercy and omnipotence that were performed by Christ, reached a King of Edessa, named ABGARUS, who being seized by a fever and dangerous illness, wrote to our blessed Lord to implore his assistance; and that Jesus not only sent him a gracious answer, but also accompanied it with his

* 1. Cor. i. 27.

† Matt. x. 7.

‡ Luke x. 1.

his picture, as a mark of his esteem for that pious prince. These letters are still extant. But notwithstanding the high esteem in which Eusebius, who transmits this account, is justly held, yet it is not to be doubted, that such a transaction would have been known to the Apostles, and that of consequence this letter of Christ would have made part of the gospel history; but as the inspired historians take no notice of it, it appears to be a fable.

Notwithstanding that all the doctrines, life, promises, and conduct of the blessed Redeemer, evidently demonstrated him to be "the desire of all nations; the hope of Israel, and Saviour thereof, yet the God of this world so blinded the minds of the Jewish nation, that altho' in all the fervour of divine love he came to his own, yet his own received him not." Still, however, a great number of the Jews, struck with those illustrious marks of a divine authority and power that shone forth in the ministry and actions of CHRIST, regarded him as the Son of God, and the true MESSIAH.

Long however had the most sacred stations among the Jews been filled with mercenary and interested men. Whoever advanced the largest bribe to the Roman Governor, was sure to be invested with the High Priesthood. During our Lord's life, this spirit of avarice strongly possessed the dignities among the Scribes and Pharisees. And, therefore, altho' every part of Christ's life was divinely aimiable, yet considering that the tendency of his doctrines was to

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lay open the baseness of such mercenary spirits, he, on account of his noble and generous freedom, became the object of their hatred and most determined malice. Fearing also lest the ministry of Christ should tend to diminish their credit, and to deprive them of the advantages they derived from the impious abuse of their authority in religious matters, they laid snares for his life, which, for a considerable time, were without effect. They succeeded at last, by the infernal treason of an apostate disciple, by the treachery of JUDAS, who discovered the retreat which his divine Master had chosen for the purposes of meditation and repose, and thus delivered him into the merciless hands of a brutal soldiery.

In consequence of this, Jesus was first brought before the Jewish High Priest, and Sanhedrim, before whom he was accused of having violated the law, and blasphemed the majesty of God. Dragged from thence to the tribunal of Pilate, the Roman Prætor, he was there charged with seditious practices, and with treason against Cæsar. Both these accusations were so evidently false, and destitute even of every appearance of truth, that they must have been rejected by any judge, who acted upon the principles of common equity. But the clamours of an enraged populace, set on by the impious instigations of their priests and rulers, intimidated the irresolute judge, though with the utmost reluctance, and in opposition to the dictates of his own conscience, to pronounce a capital sentence against CHRIST. The divine Sa-

viour behaved with inexpressible dignity under this heavy trial. As the end of his mission was to make expiation for the sins of men, so when all things were ready, and when he had finished the work of his glorious ministry, he placidly submitted to the death of the cross.

As several preternatural circumstances attended the birth of Jesus Christ, so his death was likewise signalized by some very astonishing incidents. We are to recollect that his crucifixion happened at the time of the Passover, when almost the whole Jewish nation were assembled at Jerusalem. It was the act of a whole people, who, with one voice, demanded the death of Christ, and that too with dreadful imprecations, "his blood be upon us and our children!" Heavy indeed has been the weight of that blood, these seventeen hundred years, upon that insatuated people!

To this we may add, that to heighten our Lord's disgrace, he was crucified betwixt two thieves, as being the most eminent malefactor. But even here, amidst all this eclipse of his glory, some rays of it burst forth, both in the natural and moral world. It is one of our Lord's amiable characters, to be a merciful High Priest. Touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and this one of his fellow-sufferers experienced, who sued for mercy to him in his dying moments. This princely act of Jesus, in rescuing from perdition, one of Satan's captives, demonstrates that upon the cross, he spoiled principalities and powers, and

and made an open shew of them upon it. It is highly probable that this man never knew any thing of Christ before, otherwise then by common fame ; nay, some imagine that he was prepossessed against him as an impostor, and at first joined with his companion in reviling him, and therefore the greater was his faith in overcoming these prejudices so soon, and by the meekness and patience, charity and piety, which Jesus discovered amidst all his torments ; this penitent was led to view him as the Saviour of the world. This is so far from making him a late penitent, that it gives him the glory of an early convert ; one whose heart was open to the first impression of grace.

But admitting that he had seen and heard of Christ before, yet that he should now come into the acknowledgment of him, and believe him to be the *Saviour of the world*, when one of his disciples had betrayed him, another had denied, and all of them had forsaken him ; and now to pronounce him the *Son of God, and Lord of Life*, when he was hanging on the cross, suffering the pangs of death, and seemingly deserted by his Father ; that he should take sanctuary in a dying and universally despised man, publish his innocence in the face of triumphant malice, and through the thickest cloud of shame and suffering that ever intercepted the glories of the Son of God, discover his divine power, acknowledge his celestial kingdom, throw himself upon his protection, and call upon him as the great disposer of rewards and happiness after death : This was a confession so resolute,

so singular, so illustrious, as never was outdone, as never can in all respects, be equalled, except the same Jesus were again to be crucified : For no man's conversion ever had, ever can have, upon other terms, such disadvantageous and discouraging circumstances, as this man laboured under, and yet so gloriously overcame *.

Nature too, as if conscious of the sufferings of her creator, put on her robes of mourning. It was now full moon, at the Passover, and to the great astonishment of the vast multitude, for three full hours, there was such a total eclipse of the sun, that mid-day was wrapt up in the most pitchy darkness. Phlegon, a Heathen Historian †, tells us, that in the fourth year of the 202d olympiad, (which answers exactly to that of our Lord's death,) *that there was the greatest eclipse of the sun that had ever been before, insomuch that the stars were seen in the sky.*" Thallus, a Greek historian, records the same event in much the same

terms.

* Chrysostom, with great force and eloquence, paints the affecting history of the penitent thief on the cross, in colours inimitably beautiful. That Father justly reprehends the impudence of those late penitents, who presume to take sanctuary in this example ; For what affinity, what shadow of resemblance is there between a man submitting to the first impression, and accepting of offers as soon as made ; and one who had lived under the ministry of the Gospel, and enjoyed both the outward calls of God's word, and the inward solicitations of his spirit, but turned a deaf ear continually to both ? Between a man, who to our Lord paid the highest degree of homage and respect, even when he had made himself of no reputation, and appeared in the guise of the vilest malefactor ; and one who has enjoyed the most irresistible evidence of the divinity of the Saviour, his resurrection from the dead, and exaltation to glory, the triumphant progress of the Gospel, and yet despises and sets his calls at defiance in his most exalted state ?

There was one thief saved (says the excellent Mr Boston) that the worst of men might never despair, and but one, that the most confident might never presume.

† Chronic. Lib. ii.

terms. And Tertullian in his Apology, calls upon the Romans to inspect their own Archives, and they will there find this preternatural eclipse mentioned, among the extraordinary events at the death of Christ, by Pontius Pilate, in his letter to Tiberius, the Roman emperor. And indeed from the laws of nature, never was the sun eclipsed at the full moon, nor did ever the duration of an eclipse continue above 25 minutes, whereas this was three full hours. But this was a day of wonders *

Nor was this the only miracle which happened at the death of the Messiah, there was a dreadful earthquake, and the rocks burst asunder, and graves hewn out of rocks, flew open, and the bodies of the Saints, awaked from the sleep of death, and going into Jerusalem appeared to many witnesses. The rich veil of the temple, that separated the holy, from the most holy place, was rent asunder from top to bottom; all which were highly significant of the wonderful effects of the death of Christ, and by which he demonstrated that significancy and reality was given to all the millions

* Dr Young beautifully describes this awful phenomenon.

The sun beheld it:—no, the shocking scene
Drove back his chariot; *midnight* veil'd his face;
Not such as *this*; nor such as nature makes;
A *midnight* nature shudder'd to behold;
A *midnight* new! a dread eclipse (without
Opposing spheres) from her creator's frown!
Sun! didst thou fly thy maker's pain? or start
At that enormous load of human guilt,
Which bow'd his blessed head; o'erwhelm'd his cross,
Made groan the centre, burst earth's marble womb.
With pangs, strange pangs! deliver'd of her dead:
Hell howl'd; and heaven that hour let fall a tear;
Heaven wept, that men might smile! heaven bled, that man
Might never die! Young's Christian Triumph.

millions of victims, that as types of his sacrifice, had been slain from the beginning of the world; that the sting of death was taken out, and its power broken; and that since the veil was rent, and all people might, without dread, view the most holy place; hereby was intimated, that the entrance into the holy place, that type of heaven, was now laid open to all nations.

To all these affecting transactions, we must add, that the unusual and awful gloom that covered the heavens at mid-day, the trembling of the earth, and other strange circumstances, made a deep impression upon the multitude, who a little before, with one voice execrated the dying Saviour; even the centurion, a Heathen Roman officer, cried out, *truly this was the son of God!* while the people, filled with anguish, smote their breasts and returned to their respective habitations. A happy preface, of the future penitence after a godly sort, which many of them felt at Peter's sermon, after the spirit was poured out from on high, in the day of Pentecost.

JESUS having voluntarily resigned his life, and continued three days in the tomb, he resumed it accordingly to his own prediction, and rising from the dead, declared to the universe, by that triumphant act, that the divine justice was satisfied, and the paths of salvation and immortality rendered accessible to the human race. But after his resurrection he no longer bore the character of the man of woes. His sorrow ended with his life, being a part of the curse which he fully endured. He conversed with his disciples during

during forty days, intervening betwixt his resurrection and ascension, and employed that time in instructing them more fully concerning the nature of his kingdom. Many wise and important reasons prevented his shewing himself publicly at *Jerusalem*, to confound the malignity and unbelief of his enemies. He had, in the parable of the rich man in torment, hinted the impropriety of sending evidences from the invisible world, when men have been favoured with the writings of Moses and the prophets. The Jews had already despised the strongest evidences of the divine character and mission of the Son of God. Now, if any thing can render men incapable of the favour of a farther conviction, such a malicious resistance of the evidence, which our Saviour's miracles carried along with them, would probably do it. This will appear if we consider, that one of the greatest of all the miracles which he wrought in his life, viz. his raising Lazarus from the dead, was so far from convincing them, that tho' they could not deny the fact, yet they from that day forward sought to put him to death. There was on that account no just reason that Christ should appear for the conviction of those men, who had conspired to compass his death even when they knew that he had raised one from the dead. Nay, since neither the preternatural darkness at his death, nor the earthquake at his resurrection, neither the declaration of the centurion at the one of these events, nor the confession of the Roman guards at the other, had wrought

wrought in them any remorse, it is highly probable they would have treated his appearance with their usual contempt; for, if they, during his lifetime attributed his miracles to the power of magic, it is not to be doubted but they would now represent his resurrection, as a phantom or vision, produced by the influence of infernal powers. But as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the strongest evidence of his sacrifice and mediation being accepted, and as it is also the firmest foundation of the Christian hope, the Redeemer did not fail repeatedly to manifest its certainty, to a sufficient number of faithful and credible witnesses. After having remained upon earth during the space abovementioned, and given his disciples a divine commission to preach the glad tidings of salvation and immortality to the human race, he ascended into heaven, in their presence, and resumed the enjoyment of that glory, which he was possessed of before the worlds were created.

CHAPTER III.

Containing an account of the propagation of Christianity, from the ascension of Christ, to the end of the first Century.

Immediately before our Lord resigned himself into the hands of his enemies, he had assured his disciples that soon after he would re-ascend into the abodes of blessedness, and again enjoy that felicity, which he had with the father, before all worlds *. This circumstance overwhelmed with despondency the dejected disciples. But Jesus assured them that this was a necessary step, not only on his account, but also on their own.

Meanwhile he assured them that though invisible to mortal eyes, he would still be their omnipotent protector and benevolent guide. Nor were they deceived, for about fifty days after his departure from them, he gave them the most substantial proof of that majesty and power to which he was exalted, by the accomplishment of the grand New Testament promise, the effusion of the Holy Ghost. The effects of this amazing event were not only surprizing and glorious, infinitely honourable to the Christian religion and its divine author, but absolutely necessary on account of the persons with whom Jesus had entrusted the commission for instructing the world. To investigate

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* John xiv.

this delightful subject, we are to consider that the spirit of the apostolical commission bore, that they were to teach all nations, in doctrines, which were to overturn the whole Pagan structure of superstition; and this too so interwoven with their political constitution, that they might lay their account with the most formidable opposition from the secular, as well as sacred powers †. They were to preach the gospel to all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*. But their divine master had there fallen a sacrifice to the malice and resentment of those very men, to whom Jesus commanded his apostles to announce his resurrection, and glorification in the highest heavens. Instant death, they might be assured, would be the unavoidable consequence; since it is impossible they could expect to impeach the justice of the Jewish government, by charging the crime of murder of the *Prince of Life* upon the rulers, with impunity.

They were without eloquence, to silence and confound the most learned and polished race of men that had ever been upon the face of the earth. They were to strike at the vices, without injuring the persons of men; and they were to bring about the most astonishing revolution ever recorded in the annals of mankind, without drawing a single weapon, or calling in the aids of civil power. It may be said, the apostles were actuated by ambition: They were impatient to set themselves above the undistinguished many, and

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† Psalm ii. 6, 1 and seqq.

to shew their superiority of parts, by dissenting from the common herds.

It is granted, that ambition is sometimes as predominant in the vulgar, as it is in men of letters, or heroes; but then it operates in a quite different manner, and flows in another channel.

For instance, an ignorant peasant, who has had a narrow and confined education, may be desirous to be the oracle of the village in which he lives, and to maintain an ascendant over it. This would probably be the height of his ambition: It could never enter into his head, if he were in his senses, without the advantages of a refined conversation, or the knowledge of books, to erect himself into a teacher of nations. The philosopher, indeed, might be tempted to enlarge the scene of action, and to spread his fame and knowledge throughout the world. But a desire of distinction in poor unlettered men of common sense, is confined within a narrower sphere, it never prompts them to take the world for their theatre, and mankind for their audience †.

If then the apostles were men of common sense, which is plain they were, from that excellent system of morality which they have left us, consisting of the clearest precepts, enforced by the strongest motives, and exemplified by the brightest patterns; they could not, were their passion for glory ever so strong, merely upon the strength of that motive, have formed a wild romantic project of propagating a new religion

† See Seed's Sermons.

religion among the polite, as well as barbarous nations, without either art or address to insinuate their sentiments, or riches and power to obtrude them on mankind.

No, If they had not been swayed by a principle of obedience to their Redeemer, and a well grounded hope in him, that he would prosper their endeavours; their attempt, to change the religions of all the earth, by introducing a sublime, but rational devotion, and a pure morality, had been a kind of religious knight-errantry, which some frantic enthusiasts might have set on foot; but was inconsistent with their character, who spoke the words of truth and soberness. These, then, were the true springs of their actions, a settled conviction of the divinity of their glorious master, of the truth of the resurrection, and of the rewards of immortal glory and blessedness as a crown to all their services.

As the true ground, therefore, of their apostolical undertakings, was their commission from their Lord, with his parting words, so the source of that invincible courage they displayed in its execution, was the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost †. For no sooner had the apostles received this precious gift, this celestial guide, than their ignorance was turned into light, their doubts into certainty, their fears into a firm and invincible fortitude, and their former backwardness into an ardent and inextinguishable

† Acts ii. 1 and seqq.

guishable zeal, which led them to undertake their sacred office with the utmost intrepidity and alacrity of mind. This marvellous event was attended with a variety of gifts, particularly the gift of tongues, so indispensibly necessary to qualify the apostles to preach the gospel to the different nations. These holy apostles were also filled with a perfect persuasion, founded on CHRIST's express promise, that the divine presence would perpetually accompany them, and shew itself, by miraculous interpositions, as often as the success of their ministry should render this necessary.

II. Among the last of Christ's commands was that to begin to preach the glorious gospel at Jerusalem, that the sovereignty of grace might be displayed in making the first offers of mercy and salvation to a people whose hands were, so to speak, yet stained with the Redeemer's blood. Every prejudice being banished from the minds of the apostles, and the remembrance of the ignominious treatment of their divine master, giving way to the more generous consideration of the intention of his death, with joy they endeavoured to bring that deluded people to the Saviour. Nor were their labours unsuccessful, since, in a very short time, many thousands were converted by their means to the Christian faith †.

From Jerusalem they directed their course to Samaria, the ancient capital of the Israelitish nation, where they had wonderful success. From Palestine, they, according to their commission, extended their sphere

† Acts ii. 41. — iv. 4.

sphere of action, and carried the divine lamp of the gospel to all the nations of the world, and saw their labours almost every where, crowned with the most abundant fruits.

III. Christianity having now acquired a sufficient degree of consistence and maturity in Palestine, the apostles, well knowing that order is the chief support of every community, resolved to reduce into form those early converts, and found the churches, which were to serve as models to those of every nation, and in all succeeding ages. They were indisputably entitled to do this, having the express command of Jesus for their authority, and the infallible direction of the Holy Ghost for their guide. Previous to this important step, they judged it necessary to fill up the college of the apostles, by electing a new member in the room of Judas, who had desperately perished by his own hands. Two private members of the body of Christians at Jerusalem, possessed of a high degree of wisdom and sanctity, were put up as candidates. But the church judging the decision to be of the last importance, considering the deplorable fate of the predecessor of him, who was now to be their choice, they agreed to determine this weighty matter by a solemn appeal to the omniscient head of the church, which they did by lot; when of the two proposed, *Matthias* and *Barnabas*, the former was chosen to the apostolic office*.

To these a *thirteenth* apostle was added immediately

* Acts i. 26.

ly by Jesus himself. This was an event extremely singular, and highly demonstrative of the sovereignty of the divine merey. The object of the divine call, was SAUL of Tarsus, a person well acquainted with the whole of the Jewish constitution, and eminently skilled in the Grecian philosophy, at that time held in the highest reputation. But he had hitherto employed these mighty talents in crushing Christ's church, with the most implacable fury. A call from Heaven by Jesus himself, stopped him in his dangerous career, who also commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentile nations. From that day this extraordinary man, who had been one of the most virulent enemies of the Christians, became their most glorious and triumphant defender. Independent of the miraculous gifts with which he was enriched, he possessed an invincible courage, an amazing force of genius, and a spirit of patience which no fatigue could overcome, and which no sufferings or trials could exhaust. To these talents, under the divine appointment, the cause of the gospel owed a considerable part of its rapid progress and surprizing success †.

IV. Of the numerous churches founded by the apostles in person, that at Jerusalem was the first, and was to be, no doubt, the model for all others. But we are not to suppose that the converts to Christianity entirely renounced the Jewish established worship; and

† See a valuable tract *upon the conversion of the Apostle Paul*, by the late noble and justly renowned Lord Lyttleton; who, although distinguished as one of the most faithful guardians of Britain's glorious constitution, yet he accounted it no dishonour to real grandeur, to stand forth as a champion for the truth of the Christian religion.

and it is highly probable that this did not take place till the utter dispersion of that people. However, we are assured, that they assembled frequently to be instructed by the apostles, to celebrate the holy supper, in commemoration of the death and sufferings of Christ. A sober repast concluded the joyful meeting, to testify their mutual love. But this, although innocent in itself, at last degenerating into dissolute revellings, was abolished by the apostle Paul in the Corinthian church, and soon after was universally laid aside.

At that early period too, when the holy spirit brought the sayings of Jesus fresh into the minds of the disciples, that of loving one another, seems to have made a strong impression. For among all the virtues for which the infant church of Christ was celebrated, that of charity shone forth in the brightest lustre. They not only expressed their mutual goodwill in terms of the most ardent affection, but also in deeds of the most unbounded liberality. The rich supplied their indigent brethren with such readiness, that as the author of the Acts of the Apostles informs us, they had all things *in common*. But a very bad use has been made of the expression, as if it was here insinuated, that Christianity requires a *levelling community of goods*, and of every species of *property*. But, as there is not one of all the numerous precepts of Christianity which enjoins such a practice, so the Apostle Peter sets this matter beyond dispute, where he told Ananias, who had sold his land and brought
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parts of the price for the use of the church, that, previous to his selling his land, it was his own, and after his selling of it too, the money arising from the sale was still his property*.

It would no doubt be delightful entertainment to trace the whole extent of the personal labours of the Apostles; and be informed concerning the number of churches planted in the various countries of the world; but this the divine wisdom has not thought proper to hand down to us. The most authentic account is recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*, though these undoubtedly are but a small part of the churches which were founded either by the Apostles in person, or by the disciples under their immediate direction. But we are assured, both from sacred and other histories, that they introduced the doctrines of Christ into a great part of Europe and Asia. That the seeds of christianity were sown in Britain in a very early period, appears from the testimony of EUSEBIUS, a writer of great veracity, and ever held in high esteem by Constantine the Great. He positively says, that the apostles crossed the ocean and arrived in the British isles; and Theodoret expressly mentions the Britons as a people whom the apostle Paul converted to Christianity. But whether this laborious propagator of the gospel, ever personally visited this country, is not without uncertainty.

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* Acts. v. 6. Indeed we are not acquainted with the history of any community, of which this levelling principle is the basis, except the *Essenes*, mentioned by Josephus; but whose pompous account of the simplicity and virtues of that sect, is justly considered as *idle*; and that of the *Dumplers*, a few visionaries, in the neighbourhood of Philadelphia.

V. At the same time the beauty and excellence of the Christian religion, excited the admiration of the thinking part of mankind, wherever the apostles directed their course. It is reported that many who were unwilling to adopt the whole of Christ's doctrines, were nevertheless so struck with the fame of his life, actions, and miracles, together with the sublime purity of his precepts, that they ranked him in the number of the greatest heroes, and even among the Gods *.

It is also affirmed by writers of great credit, that Tiberius the Roman emperor, wanted to have Jesus Christ enrolled among the Gods, which the senate so vehemently opposed, that notwithstanding of his cruel and implacable temper, he was obliged to drop his design. Providence so ordering it, that divine honours should never be divided between the Son of God, and the gods of the nations, which are no gods.

VI. We have shortly taken a view of the rapid progress of Christianity, and considered the characters of the feeble instruments by which this great and amazing event was effected; and from both these we must have recourse to an omnipotent and invisible hand as the true and proper cause. For how was it possible, without a divine interposition, that men destitute of all human aid, without credit or riches, learning or eloquence, could, in so short a time, persuade a large part of mankind to forsake the religion of their ancestors? How was it possible, that a handful of apostles,

* Euseb. Lib. viii. Cap. 18. Smollet's Hist. of England, Vol. I.

files, who as fishermen and publicans, must have been despised by their own nation, and, as Jews, must have been odious to all others, could engage the learned and the mighty, as well as the simple and those of low degree, to renounce their favourite prejudices, and to embrace a new religion, which was an enemy to their corrupt passions? And, indeed, there were undoubted marks of a celestial power perpetually attending their ministry. There was, in their very language, an incredible energy, an amazing power of sending light into the understanding, and conviction to the heart. To this were added, the commanding influence of stupendous miracles, the foretelling of future events, the power of discerning the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart, a magnanimity superior to all difficulties, a contempt of riches and honours, a serene tranquility in the face of death, and an invincible patience under torments still more dreadful than death itself; and all this accompanied with lives free from all stain, and adorned with the constant practice of the purest virtue.

Thus were the messengers of the divine Saviour, the heralds of his spiritual and immortal kingdom, furnished for their glorious work, as the unanimous voice of ancient history so loudly testifies. The event sufficiently declares this; for without these remarkable and extraordinary circumstances, no rational account can be given of the rapid propagation of the gospel throughout the world *. In vain have

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* Mosheimii Historia.

we recourse to the simplicity and beauty of the Christian system on the one hand, or the folly and impiety of the lives and doctrines in the Heathen Mythology on the other, as causes of this wonderful revolution in the world. No, he that built all things, had determined to build his church, and the gates of Hell shall never prevail against her.

But we are not to imagine that during this flourishing state of the church, the implacable enemy of mankind was idle in his attempts to obstruct its triumphant progress. Persecutions, proscriptions, and the powerful opposition of Pagan priests and philosophers, were employed to suppress this mighty innovation. The sars of false and dangerous doctrines were also sown in the church. But as an account of these, are matters of vastly too much consequence to be passed over in silence, we shall in the subsequent chapters give a concise, though clear account of them during the first hundred years from the birth of Christ.

CHAPTER IV.

Giving a succinct account of the calamities that befel the Church, from its being founded by the Apostles to the end of the first Century.

THE glorious Author of our religion, had in his last consolatory discourse to his disciples, forewarned them of the treatment they were to expect from the world; nor were his predictions ill-grounded: For altho' the servants of CHRIST displayed in their lives so much innocence and virtue, teaching men the purest as well as the most peaceable doctrines; yet a storm of persecution burst upon them from a quarter from whence they had the least reason to expect it. Religious rancour is of all other the most implacable and sanguinary, nor did any people ever possess a greater degree of this bitter spirit than the Jews. The dignitaries of that abandoned nation, were not content with persecuting the disciples of Jesus with the most malignant and odious misrepresentations, but in the bloody spirit of their excommunications, they deprived as many of life and liberty as fell into their merciless hands.

The amiable and heavenly STEPHEN together with JAMES, first with their blood, stained the persecutor's sword. Nor did their malignity confine itself within the

the narrow bounds of Jewry, but with all the zeal of furious bigots, they carried their sanguinary decrees into distant nations, and by them prescribed, and put to death, the innocent followers of CHRIST. That they might insure themselves of success, they laboured with incessant application to persuade the Pro-consuls and other Roman magistrates, throughout the vast dominions of that empire, that the christians were a people, who under the veil of humility and self-denial, concealed designs hostile to the supreme power of the emperor, and wanted only means to put their dangerous views in execution. The character of JESUS as king of his church, and whose unbounded dominion his followers did in the most open manner confess, afforded a plausible pretext for the propriety of their extirpation. Indeed the Roman governors paid little attention to the difference between a spiritual immortal king, and a temporal and civil prince. It was by not attending to this distinction which brought Jesus to the cross, by the permission of PILATE, and thousands of his followers to every species of torment and of death.

Nothing afforded the Jews more joyful spectacles than their inhuman executions throughout all the provinces of the Roman empire. They were in a word if not the most potent, the most bitter and desperate enemies of the Divine Saviour and his peaceable followers.

II. Such atrocious acts of cruelty by that perfidious nation, did not pass unpunished. The judge of

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all the earth, avenged the blood of his son and his disciples, with the most signal and awful marks of his displeasure. That God, who had for many ages protected the Jews, with an out-stretched arm, withdrew his aid. For a series of years, the Jews had made several attempts to cast off the Roman yoke under which they groaned. But about forty years after Christ's death, a spirit of rebellious infatuation seized that devoted nation, when they levied armies, and publicly avowed their revolt. The Romans, who always hated the Jews, on account of their singularity in religious matters, and for that sovereign contempt they expressed towards the Gentile nations, were now resolved to satiate their vengeance and utterly extirpate that stubborn people. For this purpose, VESPASIAN and his son TITUS, collected their numerous and victorious legions, and entering Judea, laid all waste with fire and sword. JERUSALEM, that antient capital, the royal seat of a long race of kings, now became a scene of calamities, the bare recital of which, fills every human breast with astonishment and horror. The TEMPLE, that celebrated residence of the divine pretence, within whose sacred recess no unhallowed foot was to enter, was now filled with hostile troops, and Roman eagles were planted, where the cherubims with out-stretched wings infolded the mercy seat. Instead of songs by the midnight choirs, arrayed in sacred vestments, were the confused noise of the warriors and garments rolled in blood. In a word, every kind of calamity which the most refined cruelty could

could invent, fell upon that devoted people; eleven hundred thousand perished in the siege, and ninety thousand were referred to drag out a wretched bondage, or fight in *Amphitheatres* with wild beasts! Even in foreign nations, remote from Judea, vast numbers of that unhappy people perished by an unrelenting persecution.

It is extremely remarkable, that the divine vengeance might be the more conspicuous; God, in bringing those unequalled miseries upon the Jews, did not employ a Nero, a Caligula, or a Tiberius, these monsters of cruelty, but TRITUS, the most gentle and humane prince that ever swayed the imperial sceptre. Nor must we omit observing, that a circumstantial account of these tremendous calamities is given us by JOSEPHUS, himself a Jew, and also a spectator of this horrid scene. His incomparable history is one of the most striking commentaries upon Christ's predictions, to whom this historian was notwithstanding a professed enemy, so that the divine mission of the Son of God was further illustrated and confirmed. *

III. But the persecutions which attended the progress of christianity, did not cease with the destruction of the Jewish state and polity: In no subsequent period indeed, were the followers of Christ persecuted with more rancour than by the Jews; but by their being subjected to the dominion of the Romans, the weapons of persecution were often wrested out

* See Sherlock on prophecy: See also this subject set in a strong light, by the very worthy and learned professor, James Robertson, of the University of Edinburgh, in his excellent sermon on the resemblance of Moses to Jesus Christ.

their hands, so that their resentment wanting the aid of the civil power, was frequently to their mortification, feeble and impotent. But when after forty years of tranquility the christians began to be persecuted by the Roman Emperors, they felt the full weight of the combined force of civil and religious severity, from that mighty and sanguinary people. It indeed seems surprizing, that the Romans, who gloried in allowing all their subjects, even the Jews, in their vast dominions, unlimited toleration in their respective religions, should, notwithstanding the mildness of the doctrines of Jesus, which breathes good will to all men, make the christians an exception to that artful and political rule. One of the principal reasons of the severity with which the Romans persecuted the christians, seems to have been, the abhorrence and contempt with which the latter regarded the pagan religion of the empire, which was so intimately connected with the form, and indeed, with the very essence of its political constitution. For, altho' the Romans gave an unlimited toleration, as we have already observed, to all religions, which had nothing in their tenets dangerous to the commonwealth, yet they would not permit the religion of their ancestors, which was established by the laws of the state, to be turned into derision, nor the people to be drawn away from their attachment to it. These however, were the two things which the christians were charged with, and that justly, though to their honour. Their ardent zeal for the enlight-

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ening of mankind, carried them to ridicule the pagan rites, not only of the empire, but of the world. The Romans, a haughty state, considered such people as a sect dangerous to society, and ought therefore to be hunted down like wild beasts. Hence we find that their historians, when they happen to mention the christians, never fail to represent them as haters of mankind, and a nuisance to society.*

IV. To these, another cause of the persecution of the christians, was that sublimely beautiful and simple system of truths confined to the spiritual apprehension of the deity, which they had adopted. And as the senses of men had been long dazzled with shows, images, superb statues, processions, and all the idle trumpery of the pagan ritual, while the christian institution, not only set aside this religious pageantry as unnecessary, but represented it as highly offensive to the Divine Being. The more moderate part of the pagans considered such tenets as odious and atheistical, while the more interested, viewed them as destructive to the chief sources of their honour and wealth. The extirpation therefore of these innovators, was universally determined upon, but how to accomplish it required some deliberation, particularly as persecution on the score of religion was a new thing in Rome. Calumny has ever been the most usual and successful weapon against truth, and indeed such unworthy arts are the only arms which

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* Tacitus and Suetonius, two of the most valuable historians of antiquity, yet they never fail to load the first christians with the most odious epithets.

can be employed against it. Nor did the Roman Pontiffs, Augurs, &c. fail to make use of all the shafts of virulence and fury, for the destruction of the christian name.

V. This storm which had impended over the heads of the christians during several reigns of the Roman Emperors, at last burst upon them, in the reign of NERO. The first imperial edict against the disciples of Christ, who by this time began to be very numerous, was enacted by this prince, whose very name conveys to all subsequent ages the idea of every monstrous and horrid quality in human nature. After having been from the fifth year of his reign, the scourge of the human race, a diabolical fancy entered the brain of this frantic emperor, of setting fire to the city of Rome. It was in the eleventh year of Nero's reign, and sixty fourth of the christian æra, when this famous burning happened. The fire began among certain shops, in which were kept such goods, as were proper to feed it, and spread every way with such amazing rapidity, that it's havock was felt in distant streets, before any measures to stop it could be tried. Besides an infinite number of common houses, all the noble monuments of antiquity, all the stately palaces, temples, porticoes with goods, riches, furniture, and merchandize, to an immense value, were devoured by the flames, which raged first in the low regions of the city, and thence mounted up to the higher, with terrible violence and impetuosity as to frustrate all relief. The shrieks of the

WOMEN

women, the various efforts of some endeavouring to save the young and tender, of others attempting to assist the aged and infirm, and the hurry of such as strove only to provide for themselves, occasioned a mutual interruption, and universal confusion. Many while they chiefly regarded the danger that pursued them behind, found themselves suddenly involved in the flame before, and on every side. If they escaped into the quarters adjoining, or into the parts quite remote, there too they met with the devouring flames. At last, not knowing whither to fly, nor where to seek sanctuary, they abandoned the city, and repaired to the open fields. Some out of despair, for the loss of their whole substance, others, thro' tenderness for their children and relations, whom they had not been able to snatch from the flames, suffered themselves to perish in them, though they had easy means to escape. No man dared to stop the progress of the fire, there being many who had no other business, but to prevent with repeated menaces, all attempts of that nature; nay, some were, in the face of the public, seen to throw lighted fire-brands into the houses, loudly declaring that they were authorized to do so; but whether this was only a device to plunder more freely, or in reality if they had such orders, was never certainly known. At length, on the sixth day, the fury of the flames was stopped at the foot of mount *Esquiline*, by levelling with the ground an infinite number of buildings.

But

But scarce had the alarm ceased, when the fire broke out anew with fresh rage, and almost consumed the whole of what the former conflagration had spared. Of the fourteen quarters or wards into which this mighty capital was divided, only four remained entire; three were laid in ashes, and in the seven others there remained only here and there a few houses, miserably shattered, and half consumed. Hardened in guilt as this monarch was, yet he had not effrontery enough to withstand the detestation of all mankind, on the account of this unparallelled piece of villainy; he therefore resolved to transfer the odium of it upon the innocent christians.*

VI. But as this supposed crime laid the foundation for the first general persecution of the christians, we shall be more particular in describing some of the principal circumstances with which it was attended. Happy for us an account of the horrid severities, which the innocent followers of Jesus suffered, for this their supposed firing of Rome, is handed down to us by Tacitus, one of the most elegant and faithful historians of all antiquity. It is true, he is thro' want of proper enquiry, too often carried away with the prejudices of his countrymen against the christians; but for this we must make proper allowances.

“ Nero to suppress the prevailing rumour, that he was author of the conflagration, transferred
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* Tacitus and Suetonius. See a beautiful account of this terrible conflagration, by the learned authors of the universal history, Vol. XIV. p. 413, 414.

“ the guilt upon supposed criminals, subjecting to the
“ most exquisite torments those people, who for their
“ enormous crimes, were already universal abhorred,
“ and known to the vulgar by the name of *christi-*
“ *ans*. The author of this name was *Christ*, who
“ in the reign of Tiberius was executed under *Pon-*
“ *tius Pilate*, procurator of Judea.

“ The pestilent superstition was for a while sup-
“ pressed ; but it revived again, and spread not only
“ over *Judea*, where this evil was first broached,
“ but reached *Rome*, whether from every quarter of
“ the earth is constantly flowing whatever is hideous
“ and abominable amongst men, and is there readily
“ embraced and practised. First therefore, were ap-
“ prehended such as openly owned themselves to be
“ of that sect ; then by them was discovered an im-
“ mense multitude, and all were convicted, *not of*
“ *the crime of burning Rome*, but of their hatred
“ and enmity to mankind. Their death and torture
“ were aggravated with cruel derision and sport ; for
“ they were either covered with the skins of wild
“ beasts, and torn in pieces by devouring dogs, or
“ fastened to crosses, or wrapt up in combustible
“ garments, that when then the day-light failed,
“ they might like torches, serve to dispel the dark-
“ ness of the night. For this tragical spectacle,
“ Nero lent his own gardens, and exhibited at the
“ same time the public diversions of the circus,
“ sometimes driving a chariot in person, and some-
“ times standing as a spectator among the populace.

“ in the habit of a charioteer. Hence towards the
“ miserable sufferers, however guilty and deserving
“ the most exemplary punishment; compassion arose,
“ seeing they were doomed to perish not with a view
“ to the publick good, but to gratify the cruelty of
“ one man.” *

We can easily discover in the whole of this narration of Tacitus, how little he was acquainted with the purity as well as the peaceful spirit of our holy religion. It is true, he was accounted by his countrymen a man of strictest morality, and possessed a mind thoroughly virtuous and humane, but still the universal prejudice of the Romans against the followers of Christ for the reasons we have mentioned above, was the cause of his painting them in such odious colours. But after all, he does them the justice to vindicate them from the aspersions of Nero, and exposes the barbarous treatment they met with from that detestable tyrant. †

The death of Nero, for the present put an end to this first persecution against the christians. The civil convulsions occasioned by the atrocious lives and violent deaths of most of the Cæsars, did not give time to their enemies to proceed regularly in their designs for their destruction. However the flame broke out a-new in the year ninety-three or nine-four, under the reign of Domitian a tyrant, no less flagitious than Nero. This violent persecution against the christians, was occasioned by a vague, or rather

* Taciti Anna . Lib. xv. cap. 44. † Ancient Univ. Hist. Vol. xiv.

rather artful rumour industriously circulated by their adversaries, that altho' Jesus Christ was crucified, yet among his relations one should arise, who, actuated by a turbulent and seditious spirit, should aim at overturning the imperial throne, and assume the reins of universal empire into his own hands.

This infernal calumny had its intended effect. The jealous tyrant, who had good reason to dread the resentment of mankind, for his many cruelties and other crimes, was stung with dread of danger by this groundless report, and forthwith employed all his power to crush this ideal usurper, like Herod, by extirpating all his race. The fires and racks, and every species of torture, were employed against the inoffensive christians. But the providence of that Being who restrains the wrath of man, terminated this bloody persecution, by the untimely death of the tyrant himself. Numbers however had suffered, and among the most illustrious who sealed the truth with their blood, were FLAVIUS CLEMENS, a man of consular dignity, and FLAVIA DOMITILLA his niece, or as some say, the wife of this eminent martyr.

We are well aware that it has been recieved as a fact, that the beloved disciple JOHN, and author of Apocalypse, who had been, by this merciless monster, banished to the isle of Patmos, was about this time cast into a caldron of boiling oil, from whence he came out not only living, but unhurt. But as history requires that the facts it relates as true, should be uncontested, especially of the miraculous kind,

via Nov. 1711. 1712. 1713. 1714. 1715. 1716. 1717. 1718. 1719. 1720. 1721. 1722. 1723. 1724. 1725. 1726. 1727. 1728. 1729. 1730.

so we will not from any strength of evidence derived from antient records, come to our hands, desire our readers to receive this miraculous deliverance as without uncertainty. It is most likely he died a natural death, in extreme old age.

VII. All consuming time has deprived us of those lights, by which we could be informed of the extent of these persecutions, and also of the forms of trial, used against the first Christians. But from the wrecks of authentic records handed down to us, we find that these judicial forms were very different, at different times, according to the mildness or severity of the laws, enacted by the emperors.

The celebrated epistle of *Pliny*, the proconsul of Asia, to the emperor *TRAJAN*, with that monarch's reply, clearly informs us of the mode of judicial proceeding against them under that reign. There we are told that they were not industriously to be sought for; but, if they should come up to the tribunals, confessing themselves Christians, they were forthwith to be punished. Under other more sanguinary reigns, we find inhuman magistrates endeavouring to compel them by all sorts of tortures, to renounce their profession.

It is almost unanimously confessed, that it was not a few, bold and resolute men, who, with a courage truly heroic, suffered in the cause of Christ. *Eusebius*, one of the most antient and authentic historians, assures us, that at a medium, five hundred suffered
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every day throughout the Roman empire, except the first day of the year, as it was deemed ominous to shed blood on that day. *

CHAPTER V.

Of the MARTYRS.

AS death closes the scene of action with all men, and as it is commonly at that awful moment, that mankind judge of the justice or severity of violent deaths, by the firmness, or pusillanimity of the sufferers, it will not be deemed an useless enquiry to trace the causes of the invincible resolution, which the MARTYRS displayed, when under all the horrors of the most exquisite sufferings. We do this the more readily, as in this deistical age, it is objected, that this steadiness in suffering, is no criterion, by which we can judge of the goodness of the cause.

It is granted, that the single act of dying with courage, by the hand of the executioner, does not always ascertain the justice of the cause, for which men may suffer. It will also be acknowledged, that many who were utterly unacquainted with the Christian religion, have suffered the most excruciating deaths, not only without complaining, but seemingly with the most heartfelt complacency. The North American, who is
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taken in war, and is led to the stake, prepares himself for the dreadful tortures, by singing his death-song with the utmost composure. The scene of his sufferings commence, with binding him to a stake, while with hideous yells, his surrounding foes long for his mangled flesh and streaming blood. Immediately some are employed in cutting out pieces of flesh from the muscular parts of his body, while others pour into the wounds boiling pitch, rozin, &c. Others, still more inhuman, pull off his nails, and thrust his fingers into the red-hot bowl of their tobacco-pipes. Others pull out his teeth with pincers, while the rest are employed in sticking his body all over with lighted splinters of wood. Some snap, at long intervals, all his tendons and nerves, while the women are slicing off large pieces of his flesh, and eating it before his eyes, at the same time regaling their young savages with his blood. This horrid scene is interrupted at intervals, for the tormentors to rest themselves, and, which seems to us astonishing, during that respite the sufferer himself seems perfectly easy, smoking his pipe, and conversing about indifferent subjects. These barbarous tortures will be prolonged sometimes during three days, till the wretched sufferer, maimed and blind, is loosened from the stake, and reeling among the firey pits around him, his sufferings are terminated by a blow with a club, or a tomahawk. *

These are incontestible historical facts. Let us now trace the causes of this resolute behaviour of the savage,

* See Charlevoix's voyages and travels; Calm's travels through Louisiana; Dr. Robertson's history of America, vol. I. page 330; and above all, the inimitable Abbé Reignald's history of the settlements in the East and West Indies, vol. IV. 8vo edit.

vage, under these dreadful sufferings; and we will find them to arise from the manner of his education, and from his hopes of revenge. From the inhuman practice of accustoming their children to the sight of these horrid scenes, the savage is, from his tenderest years, familiarised to blood. He has, for his pastime, or to gratify his revenge, often viewed death in all its forms. It is universally acknowledged that this circumstance has a strong tendency to smooth the horrors of death. Besides, from the moment he becomes a captive, he lays his account for tortures of the most exquisite kind, and prepares himself accordingly to meet them. For this purpose he arouses all his courage, and works up his mind to such a rage for resentment as in a great measure overcomes the sensation of pain. "Cowards, (cries he at the stake, while his eyes dart fire) dastards in war, and bunglers in torture, were I in your state, oh how I would tear out your hearts, and suck your blood! but my friends will come and avenge my death, they will fire your huts, and slay your wives and children, and will drown you in your own blood! I scorn death, and the ignorant wretches who inflict upon me its despised pains."

To this we may add a very important consideration, a just and striking view of the awful realities of the invisible state, is altogether unknown to the inhabitant of the deserts. Dissolution is all he dreads, and the terrors of that, abstracted from the other consideration, may be, and are, easily overcome.

The causes of that magnanimity, which the suffering Christians displayed, were just the reverse of these

of the savage. Instead of cherishing these destructive passions, of a love of blood, and insatiable revenge, he is taught to crush their first risings as he would extinguish the smallest sparks of fire among combustibles. He is trained up in a love of all men, as the sayings and actions of the martyrs abundantly testify. He is permitted to entertain a moderate love of life and liberty, when not too dearly purchased, by the loss of truth. But a firm and well-grounded hope of immortality and glory after the short and transient pains of dissolution are over, is that which fills the suffering Christian, with the most triumphant courage.

Let us shortly sketch out a few of these sufferings which the votaries of divine truth have endured, let us record their sayings, and the causes of their contempt of death. In the time of the Maccabees, at the command of King Antiochus, the friends of revelation, and the true religion, were stretched on racks, their legs were broken, and so left miserably to perish: their noses, ears, and limbs were cut off, and slowly cut to pieces, were made food for wild beasts: they were pulled to pieces by wild horses: they were roasted over slow fires with their heads downwards, or broiled alive upon gridirons. In a word, in the language of inspiration, they had trials of cruel mockings, of scourgings, imprisonments, and death: they wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, in caves, and dens of the earth. *

They

* Heb. ch. xi.

They were fryed in red hot iron chairs, which annoyed the beholders with the smell of their consuming flesh: hot boiling lead was poured down their throats: plates of brass, glowing hot, were applied to the tenderest parts of their bodies. It would tire the ear of humanity, to recount the innumerable sufferings which the followers of Jesus experienced, during what are commonly called the ten persecutions. These are attested by authors of the highest reputation, and were witnessed by men the most eminent for piety and every virtue. *

With what spirit did these noble worthies undergo such unheard of sufferings? why, with such as became the servants of *the king of martyrs*. Modestus, lieutenant general to the emperor Julian, observed to him, that while the Christians suffer, they deride us, and the torments they endure, are more painful to the beholders, than to the sufferers. Luther reports of Vincentius, that he laughed at those that slew him, saying, that tortures and death were but sports, and he gloried when he went upon hot burning coals, as if he trod upon roses.

Bainam, an English martyr said, when the fire was flaming about him, you talk of miracles, behold here one, for I feel no more pain, than if I were upon a bed of down. Bishop Ridley called the day of his execution, his wedding day.

The invincible courage which these sufferers displayed, arose from a firm persuasion of the all-sufficiency of
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* Maccab. vi. 9. 10. Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. 8. cap. 6. Tertullian, &c

the grace of Christ; from the dignity of the cross, and glory and blessedness of the crown, which they were assured, they should be put in the eternal possession of, after the light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are over.

To some, this may seem a digression extraneous, and unnecessary; but it is hoped two considerations, will abundantly justify it.

The first is, that Christianity has in all ages been observed to make its most rapid progress, and produce its most numerous converts, when watered with the blood of the saints. This is abundantly, and triumphantly proven, by Tertullian, Ireneus, and all the ancient apologists; so that, in the strong language of Luther, the world has been filled with Christians, by blood, and prayer.

To this we may add, that both the *Martyrs* and *Confessors*, who, in the face of death, and at the expence of honours, fortune, and all the other advantages of the world, had confessed their faith in Christ with fortitude, before the Roman tribunals, acquired esteem and veneration, hardly credible. The distinguishing honours and privileges they enjoyed, the authority with which their counsels and decisions were attended, would furnish ample materials for a history apart, and such an undertaking might be highly useful in many respects. There was, no doubt, as much wisdom as justice, in treating with such respect, and investing with such privileges, these Christian heroes since nothing was more adapted to encourage others

to suffer with chearfulness in the cause of CHRIST. But, as the best and wisest institutions are generally perverted, by the weakness or corruption of men, from their original purpose; so the authority and privileges granted, to martyrs and confessors in the beginning, became, in process of time, a support to superstition, an incentive to enthusiasm, and a source of innumerable evils and abuses. Ample and melancholy proofs of these we shall meet with, in the subsequent periods, when the church of *Rome* proceeded to the enormous lengths of deifying these departed saints, and, in imitation of the Heathens to their heroes and legislators, paying not only to them, but to the most profligate tyrants, divine honours.

Having now given a view of the first propagation and glorious progress, of Christianity, the prosperous and calamitous events, that beset its propagators; we shall finish the history of this first century, by giving a more particular account of the *internal* history of that first and purest period, of the Christian church.

PART II.

P A R T II.

Of the internal History of the Church.

CHAPTER I.

Giving an account of the Teachers employed in the Church, and its form of Government.

CHRIST by his coming into the world, principally intended the universal instruction of mankind; and out of all nations to form a church, whose limits were to be extended from age to age.

But that it might appear beyond doubt, that a supreme agency was employed, the divine wisdom saw it necessary to appoint first, in diffusing this light, *extraordinary teachers.*

These were again to be succeeded by a lasting establishment of ordinary ministers, who should interpret the divine will and enforce and repeat the doctrines delivered by the former, as also to maintain the people in their holy profession, and in the practice of christian virtues. For the best system of religion must necessarily either dwindle to nothing, or be egregiously corrupted, if it is not perpetually inculcated and explained by a regular and standing ministry. This, the weakness and treachery of human nature, in its present state absolutely require, abstracting from the authority of a divine institution.

The illustrious body who were employed by CHRIST to lay the foundations of his everlasting kingdom, may be arranged under the following classes.

At the head of these stood the twelve Apostles. The peculiar functions and privileges of the *Apostolic* office, seem from scripture, to be as follow: They were persons honoured with a divine commission, invested with a power of making regulations in the church, of *controlling and restraining the wicked*, when that was expedient, and of working miracles when necessary. They were sent to mankind *to unfold to them the divine will, to open to them the paths of salvation and immortality, and to separate from the multitude, and unite in the bonds of one sacred society, those who were attentive and obedient to the voice of God addressed to men, by their ministry.*

The history of the seventy disciples is but short, having been only once sent out into all the coasts of Judea to preach the gospel.

The *Evangelists* were such as the apostles sent to instruct the nations, or who, of their own accord, abandoned every worldly attachment, and consecrated themselves to the sacred office of propagating the gospel.*

The *Prophets* in the Christian church, were such as were endued with the supernatural power of foreseeing future events, and predicting to the infant church of Christ the storms and dangers that threatened them.

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* See Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, iv. 11, — as also Euseb. Hist. lib. iii. c. 38.

That there was such an order of teachers in the first age of Christianity, is unquestionably ascertained to us in *the acts of the Apostles*; where we find one of this order predicting the universal dearth under the emperor CLAUDIUS, [and others foretelling to the apostle Paul the disasters that were to befall him at Jerusalem.

Another class seems to have been those, who felt themselves instantaneously endowed with the marvellous power of speaking in foreign languages which they had never learned. The person to whom the divine omnipotence and liberality had imparted the gift of tongues, might conclude, with the utmost assurance, from the gift itself, (which a wise being would not bestow in vain) that he was appointed by God to minister unto the truth, and to employ his talents in the service of christianity.

II. No part of ecclesiastical history is more intricate than that which respects the *external form* and precise method of *governing the church*. The church of *Rome* having adopted the most tyrannical system, which they pretend to have derived from the Apostles; while, on the other extreme, many have denied the propriety of any form or order of men, who should preside in religious assemblies, alledging the same sacred pattern in support of their opinion. The New Testament seems to afford no sanction to either of these extremes. But the material dispute lies between such as, on the one hand, maintain the propriety indeed of church officers, but that every church

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has a power of deciding finally upon all matters that come before them; and those, on the other, who insist that the first christian churches were governed by subordinate courts, all subject to one supreme general council, consisting of deputations from all the other churches. If however, it is true, that the apostles acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed master, which no friend to christianity will question, then it follows, that the form of government which the primitive churches, from that of Jerusalem, the first Christian assembly established by the apostles themselves, must be esteemed as of divine institution. Could it then be agreed upon by the Christian world, what that form and order consisted in, all dissensions on this important subject might be expected to cease. One thing is certain, that no community can subsist without regulations, and the executive power is at least, for the sake of order, vested in a few.

That our Lord intended his church to consist of one body, undivided by schisms, and speaking the same things, is evident from the strenuous endeavours of the apostles to heal the divisions that arose among the Christian communities. That the same laws and regulations were meant to extend to the whole Christian churches, seems also undeniable. The power of the people however was very great, and their consent to the decisions of the rulers seems to have been required.

It was the people, who in their assemblies, chose
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their own rulers and teachers, or received them by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others. One circumstance that adorns the history of this purest and happiest period of the church, is the liberal and generous contributions which the community raised for the support of their teachers, servants, and poor, to which they gave the name of *oblations*. Their liberality knew no bounds, and their regard for one another glowed with the most ardent affection.

A perfect equality reigned among these happy communities. No titles, worldly rank or affluence, interrupted the most perfect harmony and love. To demonstrate this, they instituted *feasts of charity*, in which all indiscriminately assembled, saluting each other by the endearing names of *brethren* and *sisters*. Happy would it have been for the Christian world, had they retained that simplicity of manners, that laudable zeal for the honour of their divine Master, and that ardency of affection for one another, which so peculiarly adorned that golden period.

III. The rulers of the church were called either *presbyters* * or *bishops*, which two titles are in the New Testament undoubtedly applied to the same order of men †. These were persons of eminent gravity, and such as had distinguished themselves by their superior sanctity and merit ‡.

The hierarchial distinctions made by the established churches

* The word *presbyter*, or *elder*, is taken from the Jewish institution, and signifies rather the venerable prudence and wisdom of old age, than age itself. MOSHEM II.

† Acts xx. 17, 18.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 1.

churches of Rome, and of England, betwixt those two titles of presbyter and bishop, seem to have no countenance from the New Testament. It is not at all improbable however, that the Apostles, or their immediate successors, acted as superintendants over the younger teachers; but there seems to be no shadow of authority for that diocesan power, which has been assumed by the hierarchy, in latter ages. In no sense therefore, are we to confound the bishops of this primitive and golden period of the church with those of whom we read in the following ages. For though they were both distinguished by the same name, yet they differed extremely, and that in many respects. A bishop during the two first centuries, was a person who had the care of one Christian assembly, which at that time was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted not so much with the authority of a *master*, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful *servant*. He instructed the people, performed the several parts of divine worship, attended the sick, and inspected into the circumstances and supplies of the poor. His income was so far from having the appearance of a princely revenue, that it may easily be supposed to be inconsiderable, as it depended upon the voluntary *oblations* or gifts of the people.

IV. Almost coeval with the first Christian church were the *deacons*, that necessary order of men. It is highly probable that the young men* who carried

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* Acts v. 6—9.

out ANANIAS and SAPPHIRA, were the subordinate ministers, or *deacons* of the church of *Jerusalem*, who attended the apostles to execute their orders. Their particular employment was to see the presbyter's or bishop's table decently provided for; to distribute the voluntary contributions to the poor; and to serve at holy supper.

V. The terms of admission into the Christian communion, in that happy period were extremely simple, but highly significant. Whoever acknowledged Christ the son of God and Saviour of the world, making a solemn profession of their confidence in him, were immediately baptized, and received into the church. They generally, however, deferred for some time after their admission to the *Eucharist*, till they had every possible evidence of their faith in its glorious Initiator.

In later times, when almost literally, nations were born at once to the Christian profession, it was thought prudent and necessary to divide Christians into two orders, distinguished by the names of *believers* and *catechumens*. The former were these who had been solemnly admitted into the church by baptism, and in consequence were instructed in all the mysteries of religion, had access to all the parts of divine worship, and were authorized to vote in the ecclesiastical assemblies. To the latter were such, as had not yet been dedicated to God and Christ by baptism, and were therefore admitted neither to the public prayers, nor to the holy communion, nor to the ecclesiastical assemblies*.

Such

Such was the constitution of the Christian church in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither numerous nor splendid. The amiable simplicity and innocence of the members of which it was composed, their unaffected piety, and universal benevolence, could not fail to draw the attention, as well as gain the approbation of mankind.

VI. But as the weapons employed in this glorious warfare were not carnal, it will not be deemed improper to give a short account of those venerable authors, who, by their writings laboured to gain mankind to the cause of truth.

At the head of these were the apostles and certain of their disciples, whom God inspired and set apart to record the actions of CHRIST and his Apostles. The beautiful, but majestic simplicity that is conspicuous in that sacred volume, demonstrates the immediate interposition of the divine wisdom in its composition. Among other important improvements of modern times is the admirable art of printing, which has infinitely spread throughout the world these sacred writings at small expence; so that they are now in every bodies hands.

It has never been fully ascertained at what particular period the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume. However it is agreed on by all hands that they were collected into the form they now bear, and were received by every Christian society in the world as a divine rule of faith and manners.

It is highly probable that either the Apostles themselves, or their immediate successors, carefully separated from the several uninspired compositions upon the same subjects, the genuine writings of the Evangelists and of the Apostles.

Eusebius assures us that the four gospels were collected during the life of JOHN, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine Apostle. It may with reason be conjectured that the other books which compose the New Testament were collected at the same time *. The many spurious productions, bearing the titles of the Apostles, made it necessary to ascertain with the utmost exactness, the inspired writings, and to reject such as were merely of human composition. This was a measure highly necessary, as these spurious and enthusiastic writings had a tendency to render the history, as well as the doctrines of CHRIST, vague and uncertain, and so mislead mankind from the paths of truth.

Next to the Apostles and Evangelists, CLEMENS of Rome made a distinguished figure. Two *Epistles to the Corinthians*, are said to be the work of this venerable father, but not have been the contentions among the learned about their authenticity.

IGNATIUS, who was eminent in the list of the *Apostolic Fathers*, having conversed with the Apostles themselves or their disciples, had several writings ascribed to him. The chief of which, that learned men allow as genuine, are seven epistles wrote during

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* Euseb. lib. iii. c. 24.

his journey from *Antioch* to *Rome*. This pious and venerable man, who was the disciple and familiar friend of the Apostles, was, by the command of *TRAJAN*, brought to *Rome*, and exposed to wild beasts in the public theatre, where he suffered martyrdom with the utmost composure.

POLYCARP, bishop of *Smyrna*, was likewise a zealous defender of the truth, although some works that bear the name of that venerable father are justly accounted spurious, particularly that work entitled *The Shepherd* of *HERMAS*. Polycarp suffered martyrdom in a venerable and advanced age, about the middle of the second century.

The writings of these renowned fathers are not so much adorned with the embellishments of eloquence, as a rich strain of fervent piety, and the most unaffected devotion runs through their whole composition.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Heresies that arose in the First Century.

IT has ever been the fate of the purest and simplest institutions to be pestered with the subtleties and dangerous opinions of speculative and designing men.

Nor

Nor has any system of truth ever more unjustly suffered by the inventions of crafty and artful enemies, than the Christian religion. For however pure its morality, however simple its historical narrations, and however sublime its doctrines, yet there have not been wanting men, who have attempted to subvert and corrupt these pure fountains of knowledge. PAUL the Apostle, assures us that in his days some under a pretence of adding dignity to the unadorned system of Christianity, had forced its doctrines into a conformity with the philosophical systems they had adopted *. Of these Hymenæus, Alexander, Philetus, Hermogenes, Demas, and Diotrephes are mentioned by the same Apostle. And however inconsiderable the influence of their dangerous tenets was during the days of the Apostles, yet they imperceptibly laid the foundation of those sects, whose animosities and disputes produced afterwards such trouble and perplexity in the Christian church.

The oriental philosophy was in this learned age held in the highest repute. And as Christianity had made its way into Greece, many who had been the powerful supporters of these philosophical tenets, affected to be charmed with the beauty and excellency of the doctrines of Christ, and outwardly professed to adhere to them. Meanwhile they artfully, both in their writings and doctrines, blended the pure and simple tenets of Christianity with their own absurd and fantastical opinions. Of these, the

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* Coloss. ii. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 20

GNOSTICS were among the most early, and also the most pernicious of heretics. They held that rational souls were imprisoned in corrupt matter, contrary to the will of the supreme deity; but at the same time they expected some extraordinary *messenger* who was to come and rescue men from the malign influence of these evil *genii*, who fettered and imprisoned the souls of men in corrupt matter. The miracles of *Christ* induced them to believe that he was this illustrious person, and therefore they took every method to accommodate the doctrines of the gospel to this whimsical system.

It is impossible to express the pernicious consequences that flowed from these notions of the Gnostics. Their persuasion that *evil* resided in *matter*, as its center and source, prevented their treating the body with that regard to which it is intitled, rendered them unfavourable to wedlock, as the means by which corporeal beings are multiplied, and led them to the fatal length of rejecting the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and its future re-union with the immortal spirit. But their notions concerning JESUS CHRIST were absurd and highly impious. They denied his deity, and asserted that he was inferior to the father. They denied his humanity, upon the supposition that every thing concrete and corporeal, is in itself essentially and intrinsically evil. From hence they came to reject the truth of the reality of *Christ's* death and sufferings in a *real* body; if he suffered, they affirmed it was only in appearance, by
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an assumed temporary form, to deceive the spectators of these supposed sufferings upon the cross.

II. Among the leaders of these heretical sects which corrupted Christianity, were DOSITHEUS, SIMON MAGUS, CERINTHUS, MENANDER and some others of less note.

The first of these was a Samaritan by birth, but abandoning that sect he gave out that he was the *Messiah*, whom God had promised to the Jews, so that he was improperly ranked among the heretics, being rather an enemy to Christianity.

SIMON MAGUS was a Samaritan, or a Jew. Alexandria being at that time celebrated for philosophy, he went thither, and having imbibed a large portion of these subtle tenets, he openly professed magic, which was very common in these times. Struck with the miracles performed by the evangelist PHILIP, he pretended to embrace Christianity, but, as it afterwards appeared, with no other view, than to acquire wealth by the exhibition of miraculous deeds. The Apostle PETER discovered this sordid and infamous spirit in Simon, and with just severity reprehends the impiety of his intentions, and the vanity of his hopes, attended with a solemn admonition to a sincere repentance *. Stung with disappointment he openly renounced the profession of the doctrines of CHRIST, and commenced one of the most resentful and dangerous enemies to the gospel. It had been for time immemorial a doctrine of the oriental philosophy, that

* Acts viii.

that two great PRINCIPLES, those of *good* and *evil*, divided the universe between their influence. They held likewise, the eternity of *matter*, and that it perpetually moved by an intrinsic and necessary activity, till by its innate force it produced, at a certain period, the *evil principle*, which then exercised dominion over it, with all its numerous train of attendants. SIMON held these notions, and from thence easily, as by natural consequence, inculcated *the indifference of human actions*, the impurity of the human body, the *power of magic*, and many other extravagances.

But nothing distinguished the danger and wildness of this Heresiarch's notions more than his affirming, that in his person resided the greatest and most powerful of the divine *aons*; that another *aon* of the female sex, the mother of all human souls, dwelt in the person of his mistress *Helena*. Such were the principal tenets held by that detestable apostate SIMON MAGUS.

The NICOLAITANS too had adopted the pernicious notions of the Gnostics, and on account of the odious impurity of their tenets are reprehended by Jesus Christ himself by the mouth of his Apostle John*.

The heresy of CERINTHUS, another Gnostic, chiefly respected the person of Christ, which he affirmed to be inferior to the Father; but that he would again, after the resurrection, restore their mortal bodies to a new scene of the most exquisite delights
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* Rev. ii. 6, 14.

for a thousand years, at the expiration of which, they were to be transported to a never-ending state of celestial blessedness.

As *Apollonius Tyaneus*, the celebrated philosopher, made a mighty figure at Rome, and whose pretended miracles were, by *Philostates*, opposed to those of Christ; it will not be improper to give a succinct account of his life. He was born about four years before the Christian æra, and survived the century, being above a hundred when he died, at the accession of *Nerva* to the imperial throne, in the year ninety-six. He first was instructed in the *Pythagoric* philosophy at *Tarsus*, the capital of Cilicia, and the place of the nativity of the Apostle Paul. Like most of those who were eminent among the philosophers of that sect, he practised the severest austerities, abstaining from all manner of animal food, and even from wearing any woollen drefs, that he might use nothing proceeding from any living creature, being always clad in linen, going bare-foot and letting his hair grow. He practised every where secret mysteries, to which those alone were admitted, who had observed silence for the space of four years. He even boasted that he could speak all languages, without ever having learnt them; and blushed not to affirm that the most secret recesses of mens hearts, and their most private thoughts lay open to his view. A young lady of patrician dignity was said to have been raised to life by him, although the author of his life observes, that by all accounts the person was not quite dead when this pretended miracle

racle was wrought upon her. He every where, with great zeal attempted to revive the credit of the Pagan worship, which was daily on the decline: He firmly believed in the metempsychosis or transmigration of souls, and caused a lion to be publicly adored; pretending that the soul of *Amasis*, one of the ancient kings of *Egypt*, had passed into that animal. Be these things as they will, he by dint of effrontery and intense application, acquired wonderful reputation, having been consulted by several of the Roman emperors upon affairs of state, as well as tenets in philosophy. He is said to have suddenly disappeared, nor could the manner of his death ever be certainly known. Notwithstanding all this mighty boast of pretended inspiration, the certainty of it rests upon the veracity of Philostrates who has been proven an author utterly unworthy of credit; so that the attempt of a modern deist, of no small fame, to oppose the miracles of this arrogant *imposter*, to those of the divine *Saviour*, is as illiberal as it is weak, for truth ever will triumph over falsehood.

PART

P A R T I.

C H A P T E R I.

Giving an account of the prosperous events that happened to the Church during this century.

I N pursuance of our plan we proceed to the external history of the church. From the commencement of the reign of *Nerva* to the death of *Severus*, the second century included the reigns of several princes who swayed the Roman sceptre, most of whom were not more eminent for their warlike achievements, than celebrated for their benignity and gentleness of disposition. *Nerva*, who succeeded the inhuman tyrant *Domitian*, enjoyed the imperial dignity but a short time, during which period however, he gave a thousand proofs that he esteemed the felicity of his people the sole end of his elevated station. He was succeeded by *Trajan*, who brought the Roman empire to its utmost grandeur and extent. Nor were his victorious deeds stained with these acts of pride and barbarity too common to spirits of a warlike turn. Alike gentle in peace as irresistible in war, he secured the felicity of his people, and overawed the barbarous nations that were so hostile to Rome. All antiquity

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tiquity boasts of the virtues of the ANTONINES. SEVERUS, in the beginning of his reign, possessed many good qualities, nor were the Christians molested even during the more bloody and inhuman part of his government.

It has already been observed in our introductory discourse to this history, that it seems to have been the will of HIM, who disposes at pleasure of states and nations, to give almost universal empire into the hands of this mighty people, that by the familiarity of laws, manners, customs, and language, the progress of Christianity might be promoted throughout the whole world.

It will not then be deemed foreign to the nature of this work, to give a more particular account of the reigns of these mighty princes during the second century. After which, we shall attempt to trace the progress of Christianity, and enumerate the favourable and adverse incidents that befel it, during that period.

The moral and political characters of these princes were, happily for mankind, much superior to those of their predecessors. Long had the subjects of former tyrants been accustomed to plundering, tortures, and endless scenes of bloodshed. But the emperors of the second century of the Christian æra, were not only men of superior talents for government, but several of them have been represented and held up as models for the imitation of all future princes. *Nerva* who succeeded *Domitian*, the last of the line of the
Cæsars,

Cæſars, was a prince univerſally beloved, being in every reſpect the very reverſe to that gloomy, bloody, and infamous tyrant. During his ſhort reign, he gave innumerable proofs of his generoſity, diſintereſtedneſs and clemency towards the people. But as many enormities had crept into the government during the late reigns, it required no leſs diſcernment to diſcover, than ſteadineſs to puniſh theſe diſorders. This neceſſary, though diſagreeable work, ill ſuited the too gentle temper of *Nerva*, and occaſioning many unhappy tumults, determined him to take a partner to the throne. His choice fixed upon *Ulpius Trajanus*, the greateſt and moſt deſerving perſon of the age. *TRAJAN* poſſeſſed many virtues which were ſoiled however, with ſome vices. He was the moſt intrepid warrior and extenſive conqueror, of all the Roman emperors. Having upon the demife of *Nerva* ſucceeded to the ſovereign power, he defeated the barbarous nations which lived beyond the *Danube*, and had made terrible inroads upon Roman provinces. He even carried his victorious arms to the borders of *India*, conquering, in many bloody battles, the *Perſians*, *Parthians*, and other powerful nations. Nor were his conqueſts ever interrupted, but in his war againſt the *Arabians*, where, when beſieging their capital, he was beat off with ſuch terrible ſtorms of thunder and lightning as amazed *Trajan* and his numerous army, and obliged him to retire and allow them to enjoy that liberty of which the greateſt conquerors had often attempted to deprive them, but in vain,

vain. Little did this mighty prince know, that the *most High* had declared, that Ishmael and his descendants should never be subdued *.

The siege of Atra the capital of the *Hagarenes* (or *Arabians*) which this formidable conqueror was obliged to raise with disgrace, was the last of his warlike exploits. He died at *Selinus* in *Cilicia* in the year 120 of the Christian æra. Notwithstanding his many virtues, he was no friend to the Christians, as we shall shew in its proper place.

ADRIAN succeeded to the imperial throne. He too was a good prince. He possessed the faculty of memory to an incredible degree, as he is reported to be capable of repeating a whole book by heart, however difficult, after having once perused it. He excelled all men in his age in the useful, as well as ornamental parts of learning. However, he seems to have had a strong tincture of cruelty in his nature, which the Christians under his reign severely experienced. Among others of his great exploits, he built the mighty wall which extended from the river *Eden* in Cumberland, to that part of the river *Tyne* in Northumberland nigh to the village of *Wall's-end*, which in all probability was so named from this wonderful work terminating at that place †. The design of this undertaking was to repress the incursions of the

* Gen. 16. It is with the sincerest pleasure that we refer our readers to Dr. Newton, bishop of Bristol's admirable dissertation on this singular prophecy. See also the learned dissertation on the independancy of the *Arabs*, by the author of the *Universal History*.

† Spartian p. 6. Camden's *Britannia*. Nicholson's *Northumberland*.

the northern fierce *Caledonians*, who made dreadful desolations in the Roman province in South Britain. After having built almost innumerable magnificent structures, he was seized with such violent and intolerable pains, that he frequently called out for poison, daggers, or any other means of dissolution. At last he died, in the year of Christ 139. Previous to his death, he seemed to have been apprehensive of the immortality of the soul, as appears from the following celebrated verses, which he composed and uttered a little before he expired *.

All the antients celebrated the virtues and admirable endowments of **TITUS ANTONINUS**, and of his successor **MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS**, surnamed **PHILOSOPHUS**. Their gentleness, generosity, magnanimity, and every virtue procured them the most heart-felt applause of mankind. During that golden period, the Roman empire enjoyed every blessing resulting from the government of these celebrated princes so worthy of the imperial sceptre. It is true, that

* *The Verses were.*

Animula, vagula, blandula,
Hospes, comesque corporis,
Quæ nunc abibis in loca,
Pallidula, rigida, nudula?
Nec ut soles dabis jocos.

Thus happily imitated by Mr. Prior.

Poor, little, pretty, fluttering thing,
Must we no longer live together?
And dost thou prune thy trembling wing,
To take thy flight thou knowest not whither?
Thy humourous vein, thy pleasing folly,
Lies all neglected, all forgot;
And, pensive, wavering, melancholy,
Thou drest, and hop'st thou know'st not what.

that even under them, persecution harrassed the Christians; but a stop was put to it by the latter of these emperors, to whom *Justin the Martyr* presented his admirable apology in favour of the Christians, which had the desired effect. The imperial edict to the province of Asia runs in these terms.. *If any one for the future shall molest the Christians, and accuse them merely on account of their religion, let the person who is arraigned be discharged, though he is found to be a Christian, and the accuser be punished according to the rigour of the law* *.

MARCUS AURELIUS, the most excellent of all the Roman emperors, was succeeded by his son COMMODUS, whom cotemporary historians represent as one of the worst. And from the account of *Dio Cassius*, *Herodian*, and others, he is justly reckoned to have been one of these monsters which disgrace human nature, and are the scourges of mankind. He was of so opposite a disposition to the mild and gentle temper of his father, that his chief delight was to shed blood. His sanguinary turn of mind discovered itself in his earliest years: for in the twelfth year of his age, a person happening to make the water a little too hot in which he was going to bathe, he ordered him to be put in the furnace; nor would he be appeased, till those who were about him pretended to have put his order in execution. After his accession to the empire, he equalled, if he did not exceed, in cruelty *Caligula*, *Domitian*, and *Nero* himself, sporting with

* Euseb. lib. iv. c. 26.

with the blood of his subjects and fellow creatnres, of whom he caused great numbers to be racked and butchered in his presence, merely for his diversion. He often in disguise made excursions through the streets of Rome, that he might please his bloody mind with murders and slaughter. Often in his rambles he used to cut off the feet and put out the eyes of such as he met with, telling the former, by way of raillery, when thus maimed, that they belonged to the nation of the *Monopadii*; and the latter they were now become the *Luscini*. Some he murdered because they were too slovenly dressed, others because they were trimmed with too much nicety. Seeing one day a corpulent man pass by, he immediately cut him asunder, partly to try his strength, in which he excelled all men, and partly as he himself owned, to see his entrails drop out at once. As for his lewdness, the author of his life tells us, that he converted the imperial palace into a brothel, abandoning himself to all manner of abominations, without restraint or shame. He kept constantly, three hundred concubines, and the like number of catamites about him. He debauched all his own sisters, and murdered one of them who had refused to comply with his incestuous desires. But let us turn away our eyes from such scenes of impurity, and view his singular qualities of strength and dexterity, in which he surpassed all the subjects of the empire. He run an elephant through with his spear; and is said to have killed, in the amphitheatre, a hundred lions at one time, one after another, and each

each of them at a single blow. Forgetful of his rank and dignity, he, in the habit of a gladiator, openly fought before his astonished subjects, with criminals and slaves. Imagining one day that the people rather derided than applauded him, he ordered them all to be massacred upon the spot, and the city to be set on fire; which barbarous sentence had been put in execution, had not the captain of the prætorian guards, with much ado appeased him. Nay, he went the unheard of length of granting for a sum of money, liberty to every person of murdering all they pleased; so that the city, indeed the whole empire, was filled with blood and massacres.

But a bloody doom overtook this man of blood, in the thirty-first year of his life, and twelfth of his reign, being murdered by *Marcia*, his favourite mistress. *Pertinax*, *Didius Julius*, *Pescennius Niger*, and *Severus*, successively obtained the imperial dignity. But as the reigns of the three former of these princes were short and uninteresting, we shall take no further notice of them. The reign of *Severus* reaching far into the third century, we shall then give it a more particular review.

Having briefly delineated the political and moral characters of these Roman emperors, during the second century, we shall now proceed to take notice of the incidents that were favourable to the Christian cause under their reigns.

II. Under the reign of the emperor *Marcus Aurelius*, an event happened, which as it was both surprising

prising in its nature, and noticed by all authors, Christian, and Pagan, we shall give a succinct account of it.

In the year 175 of the Christian æra, *Marcus Aurelius* having conducted his legions over the *Danube*, against the Marcomanni, was unhappily drawn by that warlike people, into deserts surrounded by vast mountains. Here the Romans found themselves exposed to the rays of the sun, and fainting with thirst without being either able to fight or escape. In this deplorable extremity both soldiers and officers began to abandon themselves to despair, and nothing was heard through the army but groans, lamentations, and every mark of distress.

In this miserable state, when they expected every moment to be either cut in pieces, or to become a prey to the barbarous enemy, who surrounded them, clouds appeared all on a sudden gathering in the air; the sky was overcast, and to their inexpressible joy, rain fell in great plenty; which the fainting soldiers received, holding their mouths, helmets, and bucklers, up to heaven, as they are represented on the famous column of *Antoninus*, to be seen at *Rome* to this day. In this posture the barbarians fell upon them; so that they were obliged at the same time to drink and fight; for they were so oppressed with drought, that such of them as were wounded, drank their own blood mixed with the water which they had received in their helmets.

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As they were more eager to quench their thirst, than to repulse the enemy, they had been all cut in pieces, had they not been miraculously succoured by a dreadful storm of hail attended with thunder and lightning, which discharged itself upon the barbarians as they were advancing against them. Thus were seen at the same time, fire and water descending from heaven; water to refresh the Romans, and fire to destroy their enemies; for either no fire fell upon the Romans, or what fell was immediately extinguished, and the rain which fell upon the barbarians, was so far from overcoming the flames which consumed them, that, on the contrary, it doubled their violence, as if it had not been water, but oil. The enemy, thus destitute of water in the midst of a heavy shower, were obliged either to wound themselves, in order to extinguish with their blood the devouring flames, or to have recourse to the *Romans*, and throw themselves upon the mercy of *Aurelius* who received and entertained them in a friendly manner.

This seemingly interposition of heaven, is universally ascribed to the prayers of a legion, which was said to consist entirely of Christians, surnamed the *thundering legion*. *Eusebius*, *Hephrasin*, *Tertullian*, and *Jerom*, seem all to ascribe this miraculous preservation of the emperor and his distressed army, to the same cause. It is very certain however, that at this time there were a great number of Christians in the Roman army; nor are we to imagine that when in such pressing danger, every man would be calling upon his
God

God, the Christians would forget to implore the aid of that God whose sole prerogative it is to deliver. But however highly we value the sentiments of these celebrated champions in defence of the truth, yet candour obliges us to observe, that it ought to be an invariable rule never to ascribe that to supernatural causes, which may arise from the ordinary effects of divine providence.

Here also it may not be improper to observe, that however necessary *miraculous powers* and *extraordinary gifts* might have been at the first propagation of the gospel, and which crowned the endeavours of its first heralds with wonderful success; yet these supernatural gifts began gradually to diminish, in proportion as the reasons ceased for which they were conferred. Mankind had now for an hundred years enjoyed these miraculous proofs of the divine origin and tendency of the gospel, and therefore it would seem, as if infinite wisdom thought such a series of astonishing events, for so long a period, sufficient for their conviction.

III. Ecclesiastical history has in a great measure left us in the dark respecting the full extent of the propagation of the gospel in this age. It is however ascertained to us by the most unexceptionable testimonies, that CHRIST was worshiped as God almost throughout the whole east, as also among the Germans, Spaniards, Celts, Britons, and many other nations*: but which of them received the gospel in the

* Irenæus contra Hæres. lib. i. c. x. Tertullian advers. Judæos cap. vii. p. 212.

the first century, and which in the second, is a question, unanswerable at this distance of time. We are informed by Eusebius that PARTÆNUS, the head of the Alexandrian school, first conveyed to the Indians the knowledge of Christ*. Others with equal confidence maintain, that the Indian nations were first enlightned by the Evangelist BARTHOLOMEW.

It is certain however that during the reigns of these mighty princes, the conquests of the cross kept pace with those of the Roman eagles, as the victorious legions were crowded with Christians, and in whatever conquered countries they happened to winter, there they employed their strenuous edeavours to convince these nations of the folly of pollytheism, and the unavailing effect of the whole Pagan ritual.

During the second and third centuries, Germany, Gaul, now France, Spain, and Britain were the nurseries, from whence the Roman legions were supplied, Italy having been drained of men, and enervated with luxury; and on that account it is very probable that the doctrines of Christ were received in these countries much about the same period, that is, about the end of the first, or beginning of the second century. These provinces, distant from Rome the seat of empire, affording a quiet retreat for the disciples of Jesus, from the hurry and confusions that are ever found in courts and crowded cities.

IV. With a piety truly laudable, the writers of this century ascribe the rapid spread of the gospel to the

* Euseb. hist. Eccles. lib. v. cap. x.

the energy of divine truth, to the extraordinary gifts which were imparted to the first Christians, with the miracles and prodigies wrought in their behalf, and by their means, utterly excluding the intervening success of human means or second causes. All this in a great measure may be true, but the indefatigable zeal with which many learned and worthy men recommended the sacred writings, and spread them abroad in translations, to nations unacquainted with the languages in which they were written, contributed much to the success and propagation of the doctrines of Christianity. Divine providence, by giving the Romans the dominion of a large part of the world, so ordered matters that almost the whole world were acquainted with the Latin and Greek languages, for which reason innumerable copies of the sacred books were translated into these languages. To these we may add that learned and pious men also made translations into Syriac, Egyptian, and Æthiopic tongues.

Nor were the friends of Christianity more strenuous in mentioning the truth, than in combating the extravagant and visionary tenets, as well as exposing the gross immoralities of these sectaries, who disgraced the Christian name. We may be sure that such impartial and honest zeal, had great weight in removing those prejudices that had been raised against the purity and excellency of our divine religion.

V. Hitherto the Jewish nation, who had shewed themselves if not the most powerful at least the most implacable

implacable enemies of the followers of Christ, were, in this century, under the reign of the emperor **TRAJAN** and also under **ADRIAN**, his successor, visited with dreadful calamities. That infatuated nation who had with criminal obstinacy rejected the true **MESSIAH**, now, to their destruction, ranged themselves under the standards of an impostor named **BARCOCHEBA**, and even dared to dispute for empire with the Romans. That mighty people who always hated the Jews, immediately directed their forces against them, and cut prodigious numbers of them to pieces; and to prevent their ever entertaining the most distant hope of making Jerusalem the seat of their ideal empire, a new city was built upon its ruins named *Ælia Capitolina*, into which it was death for a Jew to enter. This tragical circumstance, was, however, to the Christians attended with good effects, as they had ever been harrassed with complaints and accusations against them before the Roman magistrates, by the Jews.

VI. In the earlier periods of Christianity conversions were mostly confined to the illiterate and to the lower ranks of life, but when it had emerged from obscurity, and passing over the narrow limits of *Palestine*, had been universally proposed to the cool and rational considerations of mankind, numbers who had made a shining figure in the wisdom of the world, and schools of learning, were now contented to sit down with complacency at the foot of the cross and learn those its doctrines, so mortifying to human pride. By such acquisitions Christianity made a more splendid

splendid figure, but whether upon the whole its real interests were promoted by the conversion of those wise and learned men, may be much doubted. For nothing is more certain, than that the excellency of the divine system arose from its noble simplicity and dignity, but by blending it with philosophical opinions, mightily fullied its native beauty, obscured its doctrines, and lessened its force upon the consciences of men.

PART II.

P A R T II.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Calamitous Events which happened to the Church during the Second Century.

IN the preceeding chapter, we have given a short delineation of the political character of the emperors who reigned in this century, and we then observed that most of these princes were men of vast talents, both in the cabinet, and in the field. But it is to their everlasting dishonour that under them, the followers of JESUS, experienced but little of that justice and benignity which all other subjects of the empire so amply enjoyed.

It is true, that *Nerva* annulled the cruel edicts of his inhuman predecessor *Domitian*, against the Christians. But even in the most virtuous reigns the Pagan priests and other votaries of superstition, artfully set on the populace at the public sports to demand the lives of the Christians, imputing to them all the calamities which befell the empire. The mob, ever fickle, often grew so outrageous, that neither force nor persuasion could stop their sanguinary proceedings, so that the innocent friends of the truth were delivered into their merciless power. Tumultuous
riots

riots of this kind happening in *Bythnia*, under the procuratorship of **PLINY** the younger, occasioned his writing to the emperor **TRAJAN** how to proceed towards the Christians. The well known answer of that prince was, that the *Christians were not to be officiously sought after, but that such as were accused and convicted of an adherence to Christianity, were to be put to death, as wicked citizens, if they did not return to the religion of their ancestors* *.

This edict although it moderated, yet it by no means stemmed the torrent of persecution. For an enemy had by this law, nothing more to do but *accuse* a Christian, and there was no alternative but either an ignominious death, or apostacy from the cause of **CHRIST**. By this ensnaring law the venerable and aged **SIMEON**, bishop of *Jerusalem*, was crucified, in consequence of an accusation formed against him by the Jews †. At this time too, and by the same law, was the great and pious **IGNATIUS**, bishop of *Antioch*, ordered by the emperor **TRAJAN** himself to expire in the open theatre, exposed to the rapacity of wild beasts.

II. We are not to doubt but many of the more gentle and timid Christians screened themselves under the edict of **TRAJAN**, and chiefly as that prince from his natural magnanimity detested all informers and accusers, so that the heat of persecution was in a great degree allayed. The furious bigots and Pagan priests

* *Plin. Epist. lib. x. epist. xcvii. c. 3.* which have occasioned many learned disquisitions on their meaning and import.

† *Eccl. Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. cap. 32.*

priests dreading the utter ruin of their sacerdotal craft, went the more secretly to work by enraging the populace against the Christians in all public assemblies, and too often the magistrates dreading the consequences of a refusal to their cruel demands, yielded to the torrent of popular, sanguinary clamour. It is to the immortal honour of SERENUS GRANIANUS, proconsul of *Asia*, that despising the tumultuary clamours of a blind and brutal mob, and detesting the villainous arts of bloody-minded priests, he boldly represented to the emperor ADRIAN, the cruelty and injustice of staining the scaffold daily with the blood of men convicted of no crime. The force of this manly remonstrance had the desired effect upon the mind of that virtuous prince. ADRIAN therefore issued out an edict prohibiting all magistrates from putting to death any Christian unless he were regularly tried and convicted of crimes against the laws. As he was a consummate scholar, it is probable too that the admirable *apologies* presented to him in favour of the Christians by QUADRATUS and ARISTIDES, which were highly calculated to dispel the mists of prejudice from every mind that was not lost to all sense of humanity and justice, had a mighty effect upon the emperor in enacting of that edict. Still however, the implacable enemies of the followers of Christ, found means to elude this law of ADRIAN, the *spirit* of which seemed so well calculated to screen them from the fury of their persecutors; yet laying hold upon the *letter*, the monotheism or worship of one

one invisible being, without form or shape, they reckoned to be impious and atheistical, and of consequence one of the worst of *crimes*.

III. The storm was a little allayed under the reign of ANTONINUS Pius who endeavoured by imperial edicts to restrain the brutal fury of the blood-thirsty mob against the Christians, denouncing death against such as should injure them, not convicted of any crime.

IV. But the case was mightily altered under the reign of his successor MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS, whom most writers have celebrated beyond measure, on account of his extraordinary wisdom and virtue. We must however be allowed to add, that it was neither on account of his justice or clemency towards the Christians that he merited these pompous encomiums, so liberally lavished upon his character. It is true, he did not revoke the laws enacted by his predecessors in favour of the Christians; but the measures he pursued were equally pernicious to their cause.

Of all the enemies of the Christian name the philosophers were the most virulent and implacable. These artfully represented to the too credulous prince, that the new doctrines of Jesus were destructive of philosophy, and sound morals. They, on account of the Christians celebrating the death of their glorious leader, were accused of the shocking crime of eating men, and renewing the incestuous amours of the Theban prince. So that, if we except Nero, there was no reign under which the Christians had suffered greater severities. His unjust edicts against that innocent
body

body of men, let loose afresh the unbridled rage of a bloody, outrageous mob, set on by these artful and treacherous priests and philosophers. Many victims fell by the executioner's sword, and by other unheard of methods of cruelty. Among these, the most illustrious Martyrs were POLYCARP bishop of *Smyrna*, and JUSTIN MARTYR, so deservedly renowned for his erudition and philosophy. Many churches, particularly those of *Lyons*, and *Vienne*, were almost entirely destroyed, during the persecution, which raged in the year 177, and will be an indelible stain upon the memory of the prince, by whose order it was carried on*.

V. The inglorious reign of COMMODUS, so infamous for his cruelties and his other crimes, was much more favourable to the Christians, than that of his so much renowned father. That odious tyrant, spending most of his time in criminal pursuits, or in unprincipely feats of strength, it is highly probable that he interfered very little in religious investigations; and all men trembling through dread of their own lives, afforded them less opportunity for plotting the destruction of others. Others allege that his reigning mistress *Marcia* entertaining a favourable opinion of the Christians, screened them from persecution.

Matters wore a very different aspect under his successor SEVERUS. Then *Aha*, *Egypt*, and the other provinces were dyed with the blood of Martyrs, as appears from the testimonies of TERTULLIAN, CLEMENS of *Alexandria*, and other writers.

PART

* Fox's Martyrology, vol. I:

P A R T II.

CHAPTER II.

Concerning the Order, and also of the Doctrine of the Christian Church, in this Century.

I. **N**EAR the latter end of this century, the beautiful parity that at first prevailed among the teachers in the church, began gradually to decline, and to give place to a form seemingly more splendid, although infinitely more pernicious to the Christian community.

When the pale of the church begun to be extended, and when churches were formed in the most distant provinces, the common affairs relating to the police and government of the church, could not be managed by the assembling of every individual bishop, or presbyter, in this extensive body. They on that account met in an ecclesiastical capacity, in the various provinces of the empire. To these assemblies, in which the deputies or commissioners of several churches consulted together, the name of *Synods* was appropriated by the *Greeks*, and that of *Councils*, by the *Latins*; and the laws that were enacted in these general meetings were called *canons*, or *rules*.

II. These

II. These *councils*, of which we hear little before the middle of this century, changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form; for by them the antient privileges of the people were considerably abridged, and the power and authority of the bishops greatly augmented. The humility indeed, and prudence of these pious superiors, prevented their assuming all at once the power with which they were afterwards invested. At their first appearance in these general councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches, and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment of their people. But they soon changed this humble tone, imperceptibly extending the limits of their authority, turning their influence into dominion, and their counsels into laws, and openly asserted, at length, that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people, *authoritative rules of faith and manners*. To this we may observe, that the limits of the Christian church extending daily, councils were held in different provinces, but when any affair of universal concern was to be decided, this was found impracticable by a convention of the whole Christian body, or even of that of all the provincial *synods*; a new order of ecclesiastics was then formed, who were appointed by their respective councils as their representatives, and invested with the title of *Metropolitan* or *Patriarch*, whose office it was to preserve the consistence and union of that immense body, whose

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members were so widely dispersed throughout the nations. Such was the nature and office of the *Patriarchs*, among whom at length, ambition, being arrived at its most insolent period, formed a new dignity, investing the bishop of *Rome*, the seat of empire, and his successors, with the title and authority of *Prince of the Patriarchs* *. It is exceedingly probable that they formed this model of the government of the Christian church from that of the Jews, after the utter destruction of Jerusalem by *Adrian*. Charity would induce us to suppose that they meant no hurt to Christianity by this innovation, but it was attended, and is to this day, with the most fatal effects.

III. *The doctrines* in the Christian system, in the second century, suffered a material change. Formerly the teachers in the church were plain and pious men, whose subjects of instruction were such as immediately referred their audience to faith and practice. But afterwards when philosophers, and men, who were deeply versed in the subtle ties of speculation, had joined the community of the Christian church, instructions conveyed from the pulpit assumed a new form. Then the venerable simplicity of religion was gradually effaced by the laborious efforts of human learning, and the dark subtleties of imaginary science. Acute researches were employed upon several religious subjects, concerning which, ingenious decisions were pronounced; and, which was worst of all, several tenets of a chimerical philosophy were

* Mosheim, p. 146

were imprudently incorporated into the Christian system. The Apostle Paul long before, had cautioned the converts of *Colosse* against such a dangerous mixture.

The doctrines of *Plato* reigned at this time in the schools. Incorporating his visionary notions with the doctrines of Christianity, mightily corrupted these pure sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, their veneration for the scriptures, as their sole rule of faith and practice, was zealous and uniform.

V. But Christianity suffered deeply by a dangerous error which was received in this century. The doctors of the church inculcated the necessity of abstinence from *wine, flesh, marriage, and commerce*, to such as would aspire after an ideal kind of perfection. This has been a great source of an endless train of superstitions, both in antient and modern times. We will trace the progress of these visionary tenets when we come to a more particular description of the *papal* power, in the following centuries.

Thus we have attempted to exhibit a view of the origin and progress of the Christian religion, during the first two hundred years, and the prospect may justly excite this obvious reflection, this is the doing of the Lord, and is wonderful in our eyes*.

* Psal. cxviii. 23.